United Nations S/PV.8317

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8317th meeting
Thursday, 26 July 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Skoog	(Sweden)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Yao Shaojun
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Mr. Radomski
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

The situation in Cyprus

Report of the Secretary-General on progress towards a settlement in Cyprus (S/2018/610)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations operation in Cyprus (S/2018/676)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

18-23976 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Cyprus

Report of the Secretary-General on progress towards a settlement in Cyprus (S/2018/610)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations operation in Cyprus (S/2018/676)

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2018/737, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to documents S/2018/610, which contains the report of the Secretary- General on progress towards a settlement in Cyprus, and S/2018/676, the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations operation in Cyprus.

It is my understanding that the Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it.

I should like to inform the Council that the presidency of the Council has met with the representatives of the parties, who have confirmed that they maintain their well-known positions vis-à-vis the item on the Council's agenda. On the basis of those meetings, with the consent of the members of the Council, the presidency has drawn the conclusion that the Council can proceed to take a decision on the draft resolution before it.

If I hear no objection, I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, France, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Russian Federation, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America

The President: The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2430 (2018).

The meeting rose at 10.15 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.8318

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8318th meeting
Thursday, 26 July 2018, 10.15 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Skoog	(Sweden)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Temenov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Mr. Radomski
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Letter dated 1 June 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/528)

Letter dated 20 May 2018 from the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/531)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2018/655)

Letter dated 18 July 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/727)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

18-23994 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Letter dated 1 June 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/528)

Letter dated 20 May 2018 from the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/531)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2018/655)

Letter dated 18 July 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/727)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and Ms. Justine Masika Bihamba, Synergy of Women for Victims of Sexual Violence.

Ms. Zerrougui is joining via video-teleconference from Kinshasa.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to the following documents: S/2018/528, which contains a letter dated 1 June 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council; S/2018/531, which contains a letter dated 20 May 2018 from the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo addressed to the President of the Security Council; S/2018/655, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and S/2018/727, which contains a letter dated 18 July 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

At this meeting, the Council will hear briefings by Ms. Zerrougui; Ambassador Mansour Alotaibi, Permanent Representative of Kuwait, in his capacity as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and Ms. Bihamba.

I now give the floor to Ms. Zerrougui.

Ms. Zerrougui (*spoke in French*): I should like to thank the Council for affording me the opportunity to brief it on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Less than five months before the elections, to be held on 23 December, preparations reached a key turning point yesterday with the opening of registration centres for presidential and legislative election candidacies. The elections continue to give rise to high expectations, both among the Congolese people and the international community, as they are of key significance to shoring up stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and throughout the region.

Although significant progress has been achieved in meeting the critical benchmarks set out in the timetable, the electoral process remains a source of suspicion and mistrust between the majority and the opposition and between the opposition and the Independent National Electoral Commission. The opposition's grievances relate, inter alia, to voting machines, the electoral registry and the unresolved issue of the replacement of the representative of the Union pour la démocratie et le progrès Social (UDPS) within the Independent National Electoral Commission.

These grievances were recently reiterated by a group of five political opposition parties and platforms, including UDPS, Ensemble pour le changement, Union pour la nation congolaise, Mouvement de libération du Congo (MLC) and Dynamique de l'opposition, through a joint statement published on July 23 in Kinshasa. The statement also demands the return of high-profile personalities and the release of political prisoners within the framework of implementing the de-escalation measures set out in the 31 December 2016 agreement.

On July 24, Jean-Pierre Bemba, President of the MLC and the party's nominee for the presidential elections, held his first press conference in Brussels to confirm his return to Kinshasa on 1 August to declare his candidacy. The same day, Moïse Katumbi also announced his upcoming return without however specifying a date. In the meantime, the newly established political platform — Front commun pour le Congo — for which President Kabila was designated the moral authority, has yet to nominate a presidential candidate.

(*spoke in English*)

I am, however, encouraged to note that while encountering the disagreements that I just mentioned against the backdrop of immense logistical and financial challenges, all major political parties were able to successfully register candidates for provincial legislative elections. In my travels last week to Kolwezi, Lubumbashi and Kalemie, I heard first-hand the lengths to which political parties have gone to ensure their participation in upcoming elections. In some remote areas, candidates travelled nearly 1,500 kilometres by motorcycle to declare their candidature. I was also glad to see the engagement between the Independent National Electoral Commission and political parties, which ultimately resulted in several deadline extensions for provincial legislative candidate registration, thereby contributing to ensuring that the process is more inclusive and legitimate. Following a slow start, more than 18,000 candidacies were ultimately enrolled to compete for 715 seats. Although the final tally is yet to be published, initial indications suggest that women made up less than 12 per cent of all registered candidates. I continue to use my good offices to urge political parties to ensure greater female representation and participation in the upcoming elections.

Although I am pleased to note such a level of political engagement on the part of all parties, I remain concerned by the poor implementation of confidence-building measures. While the Minister of Justice announced the release of 4,109 prisoners, only a few of them were part of the confidence-building measures, and the release of high-profile personalities was completely ruled out. As violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms continue to impact negatively on democratic space, peaceful demonstrations are being suppressed. Civil society actors and political opponents continue to be arbitrarily arrested, and media workers threatened. Conditions leading to a level playing field are therefore not yet in place, and without progress on those fronts, the credibility and inclusivity of upcoming elections could be at risk.

On the logistical side, Council members will recall the Government's stated intent — including in the President's state of the nation address — to manage and finance elections without external support. The logistical support of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) for elections, mandated by the Security Council, was initially planned to begin today. However, thus far, no request has been received from the Independent National Electoral Commission. Although we remain ready to provide support as requested, I must note that, in the interest of responsibly managing United Nations resources, we will soon require more clarity from the Council in that regard, as the first aircraft for MONUSCO's logistical support was denied landing clearance upon an attempted arrival yesterday.

On a positive note, we were pleased to hear the Minister of Health announce the official end of the Ebola virus disease outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo this past Tuesday. In the face of that challenge, MONUSCO, together with other United Nations agencies, contributed to the Government's response by offering all available means to help contain the disease and prevent its spread to major urban centres. I commend the leadership demonstrated by the Government in confronting that challenge. Such a laudable achievement demonstrated what is possible through effective cooperation among the authorities, the United Nations and external partners.

While the country is focused on the important upcoming elections, the security environment continues to be volatile and is deteriorating in some parts of the country. We are seeing an intensification of inter-community violence and activities of local armed group coalitions that sometimes espouse a politically driven narrative. I remain particularly concerned about the Kasais, where the activities of several dissident militia factions continue; North Kivu where the Allied Democratic Forces is increasingly active; and South Kivu, Maniema and Tanganyika provinces. In all those areas, the civilian population — especially women and children — continue to pay the highest price for conflict. They are enduring grave human rights violations, displacement, challenges to their livelihoods and the disruptions to their education. I myself just returned from Tanganyika province a few

days ago, and I witnessed the unbearable conditions in which internally displaced persons are living and heard about the suffering and continuing tensions among communities.

In Ituri province, I am glad to report, tensions in Djugu have recently abated. We undertook immense efforts in support of local authorities, including intensive dialogue at the local level to reconcile communities, good-offices engagement with local and national authorities to ease tensions, strong support for judicial authorities to fight impunity, and the deployment of three standing combat deployments to the highest-risk areas. Those deployments are a realization of our protection-through-projection approach, thereby showing that results are possible where logistical capability and the right troop mindset exists. In Ituri, as elsewhere in the country, although MONUSCO's efforts can help protect civilians and mitigate the risk of further deterioration, root causes need to be addressed by Congolese authorities.

In that security context, I note with concern that MONUSCO personnel are increasingly targeted. Our troops in the Beni area have been attacked several times, as the Council is aware. We have also recently experienced a number of staff abductions, the most recent of which was only this past week in Uvira. In my visits to the eastern part of the country last week, I listened to members of our staff voice their increasing concerns about the security situation and their safety resulting from their work with the United Nations. While I am working to enhance our staff's safety and security, such events are a constant reminder of the risks that staff and troops face every day in support of MONUSCO's mandate. In this volatile context, the stakes for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the region's future stability, are high. In the coming months, MONUSCO will operate in an increasingly tense environment, while faced with high expectations. However, as Council members are aware, we will navigate through that period with fewer resources.

The General Assembly recently approved a budget reduced by $38.8 million compared to the Secretary-General's proposal — a significant reduction that further compounds the impact on our operational ability following last year's budget cuts. I do not mention that to make a plea for more resources; we all know the new financial reality facing all peacekeeping missions. I highlight it because it is important that we collectively understand that while MONUSCO's resources continue to shrink, its mandate remains the same and expectations only continue to grow. We will therefore be limited in our ability to respond to all emerging protection risks, particularly in densely populated urban areas or in areas where we have no presence. As such, I must emphasize the importance of our collective work, as the United Nations and the international community, in preventing electoral violence and ensuring the process remains on track.

(*spoke in French*)

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is at a crossroads. That is why I call on all stakeholders to seize this historic opportunity to enable the holding of inclusive, transparent and credible elections on 23 December in order to offer a more stable future to the country and its people.

The President: I thank Ms. Zerrougui for her briefing. I also convey to her, on behalf of every member of the Security Council, our strong support for the work she does and for the efforts of the men and women in the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, sometimes under very difficult circumstances.

I now give the floor to Ambassador Alotaibi.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait): I have the honour to deliver a statement in my capacity as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In my briefing this morning, it is my intention to provide an overview of the work of the Committee since I assumed the role of Chair in January. I also intend to set out a number of possible activities that the Committee may undertake over the course of the remainder of 2018.

Since assuming the role of Chair in January 2018, I have sought to continue the work of the Committee and to raise awareness of the situation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. On 1 February, in continuation of its work, the Committee approved the addition to its sanctions list of the names of four individuals who continue to pose a threat to the peace and security of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Over the course of the first six months of 2018, I convened various meetings of the Committee. The speakers at those meetings included Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the

Congo (MONUSCO); a representative of the Mission's Joint Mission Analysis Centre on MONUSCO's arms embargo monitoring mandate; a representative of the United Nations Mine Action Service on weapons and ammunition management in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; a representative of the Permanent Mission of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the United Nations on combating sexual violence and child recruitment in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. The Committee also met with the members of the Group of Experts, who presented an overview of the findings and recommendations contained in the Group's final report (S/2018/531).

My delegation has also hosted, at the Permanent Mission of Kuwait, four gatherings of Committee members, including three informal informals on issues related to the work of the Committee. In February and April, for example, my delegation hosted informal informals with the Senior Official of the United Nations team, Mr. Robert Petit, in the course of his periodic visits to New York. The Committee continues to support Mr. Petit and his team of technical experts as they provide support to the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in its investigations into the March 2017 murders of two late members of the Group of Experts, Zaida Catalán and Michael Sharp.

Looking forward, the coming months will be a critical period for the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In that context, the Committee will remain vigilant and ensure that its work and that of the Group of Experts contributes to peace and stability in the country and the region. Towards that end, I intend to continue collaboration with relevant interlocutors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as those in the Great Lakes region with a view to obtaining updated information on various aspects of the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo that are relevant to the Committee's mandate and promoting further synergy in our work.

In terms of other activities that the Committee is considering, I have announced the convening of a briefing for all Member States in connection with the final report of the Group of Experts on Friday, 27 July. Over the course of the second half of the year, the Committee will likely convene a meeting to hear the Group of Experts, whose mandate was extended pursuant to resolution 2424 (2018), present its programme of work. I would also like to explore the possibility of holding meetings on the arms embargo along the lines of the workshop format that the Group of Experts recommended in its final report. As part of its continued consideration of natural resources issues, the Committee could be updated on efforts by the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Member States to address issues of illegal exploitation and smuggling of natural resources by armed groups, and on actions taken by Member States to assist the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the countries in the Great Lakes region to develop a responsible minerals trade.

The President: I thank Ambassador Alotaibi for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Bihamba.

Ms. Bihamba (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Swedish delegation, which invited me here to speak on behalf of Congolese women, who are too often the victims of sexual violence and excluded from public affairs management and peace negotiations.

I am a woman human rights defender and the President of the Board of Directors of the Synergy of Women for Victims of Sexual Violence, a platform of 35 organizations working to improve, promote, defend, respect and protect the rights of women, especially women victims of sexual violence. We are also involved in governance, advocacy, human rights protection and sustainable peacebuilding in North Kivu in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Today I would like to address three themes: the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO); the increase in sexual violence against women and girls; and the tense political climate following the failure to hold elections within the constitutional deadlines.

The decision to close some of MONUSCO's bases once again exposes the civilian population in sensitive areas. Despite rapid deployment, help often arrives too late, when the damage is already done. Due to diminished financial resources, the Joint Human Rights Office is no longer present on the ground, and as a result is no longer able to effectively document cases of serious human rights violations, which are now reported by telephone. The population also fears

disorder and spillover on election day and hopes that MONUSCO will train Congolese police officers with a view to maintaining order and securing polling stations.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the situation of women, particularly victims of sexual violence, is deteriorating day by day due to the proliferation of armed groups. These groups are at the root of recurring wars leading to mass rape and displacement, mostly of women and their children. Cases of rape and violence have increased this year by more than 60 per cent in North Kivu province.

The political climate in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is tense due to the failure to hold elections within the constitutional deadlines. Various demonstrations have been repressed by the security forces, resulting in civilian deaths, much material damage — especially to Catholic convents and churches — and the arbitrary arrests of leaders of the citizen movement, opposition politicians and human rights defenders. With five months to go before the planned elections, an improvement in the political atmosphere is far from being a reality for the activists still in prison.

In addition to this political instability and the brutal repression of dissenting voices, several legal reform projects initiated by the Congolese Government tend to further reduce freedom of expression and the Congolese civic space. Among them, one is aimed at modifying the operating regime of national and international non-governmental organizations and another is aimed at combating terrorism. If these reforms are adopted in their current terms, the key principles of the rule of law will be undermined.

The electoral law promulgated on 24 December 2017 constitutes a serious obstacle to the rights and freedoms of Congolese. Among other constraints, it requires candidates to reach a threshold of representativeness of at least 1 per cent of votes at the national level. As a result, in some electoral districts, no candidacy papers for provincial elections had been filed by the deadline. Moreover, this law particularly discriminates against women in electoral races by not taking into account their socioeconomic situation. The law requires candidates to pay a $1,000 deposit, which is an astronomical amount for women and young people, most of whom live on less than $1 a day. The Congolese Women's Forum on Resolution 1325, representing women from all provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, have urged the authorities of the Republic to abandon this provision.

The use of the voting machine proposed by the Government and the Independent National Electoral Commission has also been challenged by political actors and the majority of the population for fear of electoral fraud. The Democratic Republic of the Congo currently has a population in which over 65 per cent of the people are illiterate, most of them women and young people, who will have enormous difficulty in using the machine, which has been programmed in French.

Finally, in my capacity as a woman human rights defender and Chair of the Board of Directors of Synergy of Women for Victims of Sexual Violence, and on behalf of all women victims of abuse, we recommend the following to the Security Council and to States Members of the United Nations: to pressure the Congolese Government to implement a policy that genuinely promotes women's participation in decision-making bodies and women's candidacies for appointments; to call on the Government to respect freedom of expression, the right to demonstrate and the civic space of the Congolese population; to demand that the Government respect the New Year's Eve agreement and the Constitution, that is, to respect the rule of law; to have MONUSCO restore bases in sensitive areas to ensure the effective protection of civilians and support the ongoing electoral process; to direct the Human Rights Office to effectively document human rights violations by going into the field; and to materially support civil society organizations for the promotion and defence of women's rights so that they can provide leadership training for women leaders with a view to their gaining access to decision-making positions.

I thank you once again, Mr. President, for honouring me, as a woman human rights defender, with this opportunity to make the voices of the voiceless heard.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Masika Bihamba for her briefing.

(*spoke in English*)

I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I warmly thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, for her very enlightening briefing and, more broadly, for her exemplary commitment and action as well as that of her teams. I

also thank Ms. Justine Masika Bihamba, Coordinator of Synergy of Women for Victims of Sexual Violence, for her important and inspiring testimony. Finally, I thank Ambassador Alotaibi, Permanent Representative of Kuwait, for his briefing in his capacity as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

At this crucial time for the future of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, our shared priority is clear. The aim is to hold the elections on the scheduled date in December, and to ensure that they are held in good conditions. Indeed, only full respect for the Constitution and democratic transition can guarantee stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the entire region. This is a challenge but also an historic opportunity for the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

From there, our road map is to encourage the authorities to take all steps in this direction and to call on all stakeholders to respect the spirit of consensus that prevailed when the political agreement of 31 December 2016 was signed. In this context, maintaining the unity of international partners will be crucial to the success of the process. Beyond the unity shown by the Security Council, we must continue to work closely with the African Union and the countries of the region, which play an essential role. In this regard, I welcome the adoption of the 19 July joint communiqué by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union and the Security Council, which perfectly illustrates the convergence of views between the two Councils on the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This is an essential point.

In this regard, I would particularly like to stress two elements that are essential to the success of the process under way. The first element is the need to restore Congolese confidence in the technical preparations for the elections. Most of the deadlines have been met so far, which is a positive point. The audit of the electoral register by the International Organization of la Francophonie showed that the register could be improved and the Independent National Electoral Commission undertook to make the necessary corrections. This is a good thing, and we expect concrete action to be taken quickly to that end.

However, some uncertainties remain, particularly regarding voting machines and election logistics. With respect to logistics, we have taken note of the willingness of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to pay for the organization of the elections in its entirety. However, I would like to reiterate what Ms. Zerrougui has just said, that the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) is at the disposal of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to provide logistical support. The necessary resources have been made available by the General Assembly. It is essential that the relevant authorities transmit to MONUSCO all necessary information to enable the Mission to provide such support in a timely manner, as appropriate. It is imperative that the timing and proper conduct of the elections not be called into question for logistical reasons.

With regard to voting machines, we call on the Independent National Electoral Commission to be transparent so that all citizens have access to the machines and can become familiar with how they work. There are a number of technical questions, which must be answered in order to ensure everyone's confidence in the technical preparations for the elections.

The second element required for success is the importance of ensuring the credibility of the political process leading up to the elections. Above and beyond respect for the various stages of the electoral calendar, transparency in the process, along with the opening up of the political and democratic space, are vital to the holding of credible and peaceful elections. The political meetings that took place without incident in Kinshasa in recent weeks is a positive sign. We must continue along that path.

We call in particular upon the Congolese Government to lift the ban on demonstrations and take tangible action to implement the 31 December 2016 agreement through de-escalation measures, the release of political prisoners or prisoners of conscience, and the end of politically motivated legal proceedings. All candidates should be able to compete freely and on equal footing, and voters should be able to make their choice with full awareness and without being coerced. In that regard, respect for human rights, and in particular the commitments made by the authorities to the Human Rights Council in Geneva, is obviously a crucial element.

I will end my remarks with a word on the security and humanitarian situation, which remains of concern. New pockets of tension have emerged in the east of

the country, which have resulted in several civilian casualties. Investigations of the situation in the Kasai, conducted by the Group of Experts commissioned by the Human Rights Council, have revealed that war crimes and crimes against humanity may have been committed in that region. MONUSCO took swift action to respond to tensions, which proves the relevance of its new operations concept of protection through projection. I commend the Mission on its important work and encourage it to continue its transformation in order to achieve optimal efficiency.

The Security Council has sent a clear message to the perpetrators of abuses by imposing new sanctions against individuals responsible for committing serious human rights violations. Impunity will not be tolerated. France encourages the Congolese authorities to conduct a prompt investigation into abuses reported by the Human Rights Council so that those responsible can be brought to justice.

France, together with its partners in the Security Council, the African Union and the region, will remain resolute and committed to supporting the Democratic Republic of the Congo so as to ensure that the elections are conducted in the right conditions and that they usher in a new era of stability and development for the country and its people.

Mr. Cohen (United States): I would like to thank the representative of Kuwait, as Chair of the Committee established, pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui for their briefings. We appreciate their efforts to keep the Security Council informed of progress towards elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We would especially like to thank Ms. Masika Bisamba for her presence in the Council Chamber today. We were all moved by her testimony regarding the threats against women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and inspired by her courage in seeking protection, care and justice for the survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. We thank her for her leadership.

Yesterday was an important day in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with the opening of the candidate registration period. As we have repeatedly stated, we expect President Kabila to abide by the Constitution and the December 2016 agreement. He is not eligible under Congolese law to seek a third term. The United States regrets the fact that President Kabila did not use his 19 July address to Parliament to resolve the uncertainty with regard to his intentions.

Turning now to elections preparations, 23 December is rapidly approaching. The Council authorized the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to provide logistical support to the elections. We expect the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to take advantage of the support that MONUSCO has offered. It is absolutely critical that the Independent National Electoral Commission make detailed requests for logistical support from MONUSCO in a timely fashion. We have not yet seen evidence of how the Electoral Commission would organize elections without MONUSCO's assistance. The Mission cannot afford to wait until the last moment to put a plan into action.

In addition, the Commission must take steps to ensure that voters can cast their ballots via a mechanism that is tested and trusted and guarantees the secrecy of the vote, namely, paper ballots. Deploying more than 100,000 unfamiliar, untested and possibly unworkable electronic voting machines for the first time during a critical national election poses an enormous and unnecessary risk. What do Congolese authorities plan to do if those untested voting machines malfunction on election day and jeopardize the credibility of the results? Is there a back-up plan? If so, what is it?

We must also not lose sight of the violence we have witnessed recently in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The United States commends MONUSCO's quick response to clashes in Bijombo this month but remains deeply concerned about reports of human rights abuses, with tens of thousands of people fleeing the violence. Ultimately, violence in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and in other parts of the country will not abate without genuine, credible, inclusive and peaceful elections and without a commitment to holding those responsible for such violence to account. We have not forgotten the murders of United Nations experts Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalán, and we will not stop pressing for those responsible to be held accountable.

The international community is united in those concerns, as evidenced by last week's joint communiqué with the African Union Peace and Security Council. We urge other members of the Security Council to push for well-planned elections, including through members'

bilateral conversations, and to consider the possibility of targeted sanctions against those who threaten peace and security in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Congolese people have been waiting nearly two years for an opportunity to cast their votes and choose new leaders, as outlined in their Constitution. President Kabila has committed repeatedly to respecting the Constitution and to implementing the December 2016 agreement. We are a mere five months away from election day. The time for posturing is over.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): We would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui for her comprehensive briefing and her dedicated efforts on the ground. We also thank Ambassador Mansour for his briefing on the activities of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Moreover, we thank Ms. Justine Masika Bihamba for sharing her perspective.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is at a critical juncture, and it is important that the Council have the opportunity to follow up developments with regard to preparations for the December elections. We welcome the progress made in preparing for the elections with the support of subregional, regional and international partners. The Government and all other national stakeholders must continue their efforts to create conditions that are conducive to holding credible and peaceful elections, in line with the 31 December 2016 agreement.

We note that the independent auditing report issued by the International Organization of la Francophonie (OIF) on the voter register confirmed that it was "inclusive, exhaustive and updated, but needed some improvement. We hope that that will help reinforce confidence-building measures. It is also encouraging that the presidential majority welcomed the conclusion of the OIF report. We hope the publishing of the voters' list by the Independent National Electoral Commission will help to overcome the doubts surrounding voter participation.

The coming months will be of critical importance for final preparations ahead of the 2018 elections. It is absolutely necessary that all Congolese parties make the necessary compromises with a view to preserving continuous dialogue and the spirit of consensus as the only way to conduct peaceful elections. In that regard, it was necessary that the Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council send a clear and unified message to the Congolese political actors last week through the joint communiqué adopted at the end of their annual consultation. We believethat the elements of the communiqué provide a useful framework on how we should continue to handle the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the months leading up to elections in December.

Enhancing the coordination of the United Nations, the African Union (AU), the Southern Africa Development Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and other international partners is necessary to ensure more coherent and effective support to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, especially at this critical juncture. In that context, although the planned visit by the Secretary-General and the AU Commission Chairperson to Kinshasa was delayed, we very much hope that it will happen next month. The idea of having the Security Council visit the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is now being proposed to happen in October, is also very welcome. The participation of the AU Peace and Security Council in that visit, in line with the agreement reached last week, will send the right signals, and we hope that all the necessary arrangements will be made to make this happen.

We appreciate the considerable technical and logistical support provided by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) for the preparation of the elections in conformity with the electoral calendar. The role of MONUSCO in support of the electoral process continues to be very important, and we fully support all the efforts of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui and the United Nations team on the ground.

The deployment of the additional rapidly deployable battalions, to be based in the troubled Kasai and Tanganyika regions, will be important for strengthening efforts aimed at containing violence in rural hotspots, which may affect the process of elections. In that spirit, we appreciate that the Secretary-General proposed the option of deploying individual police officers, while remaining within the authorized police strength of MONUSCO, which can contribute to the early warning efforts, prevention, mitigation and reduction of potential tensions during the conduct of elections. Such initiative will be effective if implemented together with the national police and local communities.

Finally, we would like to welcome the official announcement of the end of the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in accordance with the World Health Organization guidelines, and we echo the statement issued by the African Union today commending the Congolese Government for its swift and effective response allowing a coordinated and efficient intervention of all concerned partners to swiftly contain the outbreak.

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Republic of Equatorial Guinea thanks Special Representative Leila Zerrougui for the important briefing she has just delivered. We are also grateful for the presence of Justine Masika Bihamba, the Congolese civil society representative, and for her statement. Lastly, we thank Ambassador Alotaibi for his briefing.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is entering a decisive phase for its immediate future. Equatorial Guinea welcomes the progress that has been made in the political and technical process for the holding of elections in December. This reflects the commitment of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to complying with the electoral calendar established on 5 November 2017 and its commitments with regard to the 31 December 2016 agreement. The measures taken demonstrate the Government's determination to effectively organize inclusive, fair and transparent elections on 23 December. We believe that only through constructive inter-Congolese dialogue will the formation of a Government of national unity lead the country to overcome the tensions we have seen and facilitate the progress of the electoral process, strengthen confidence in and the mechanisms for oversight and implementation for a transparent and inclusive process that allows voter participation under the principle of universal suffrage and the best possible conditions.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea therefore welcomes the observations made in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/655) on the political and technical processes under way for the holding of elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which show considerable progress with regard to technical and legislative preparations for the holding of elections.

Our Government commends all the measures taken with regard to the organization of the elections, including the submission of candidates from different political parties and the establishment and extension of deadlines, which reflects the will and commitment of the Government and political actors to carry out the electoral process. We also believe that we must not lose sight of or neglect the different possible post-electoral scenarios, and we must adopt the necessary preventive measures in the event of any eventuality.

With regard to technical aspects, it is important that the Independent National Electoral Commission be able to function normally and that any technical issue that gives rise to a discrepancy can be resolved satisfactorily. In that regard, we are referring specifically to the use of the voting machines. We welcome the Government's efforts to fully fund the electoral process and encourage it to continue to work and regularly strengthen its cooperation with the Commission so that the funding can be carried out and can effectively contribute to satisfactory elections. We would also like to underscore the support that can be provided by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

We recognize the States members of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region, the African Union, the International Organization of la Francophonie and the Southern Africa Development Community, as well as neighbouring States, in particular Angola, South Africa and the Congo, as facilitators of the political dialogue in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and throughout the region. We also call for their cooperation in investigating and combating the criminal networks and armed groups involved in the illegal exploitation of the country's resources. Pressure, monitoring and punishments must be brought to bear on those criminal groups to put an end to their crimes. Otherwise, the Security Council will still be dealing with problems in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for many years to come, even after the transparent elections of next December.

Allow me to commend MONUSCO for the work it has carried out in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for many years and not always in the best of circumstances. We urge all parties involved in this process, including the Government and other political actors, to stay the course of inclusive internal dialogue and refrain from any violent action that could disrupt the process.

Finally, we call on the international community to continue to resolutely support the Government, MONUSCO, the Independent National Electoral Commission and all other parties involved in this process to promote confidence-building measures to guarantee a favourable environment for the holding of peaceful elections and to fully comply with the road map until power has been peacefully transferred in an environment of peace and national harmony. A happy conclusion to the political transition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo will have positive repercussions for stability throughout the region.

In conclusion, I take this opportunity to thank the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for its efforts to eradicate the Ebola outbreak and all actors who have contributed thereto. We also align ourselves with the communiqué on this issue that was issued by the African Union.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): Let me begin by thanking Special Representative Zerrougui for her very clear briefing. I would also like to thank the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) for all the important work it does in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I further thank the Ambassador of Kuwait for her briefing. Sanctions remain an important tool that the Council has at its disposal to address threats to international peace and security in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I would particularly like to thank Ms. Bihamba for her really clear and incisive briefing to the Council and in particular for the very brave work that her organization does on the ground to support and advocate for women. I thought she made some really interesting and clear recommendations at the end of her speech, and I would like to try to respond to each of those five recommendations in what I say today.

First, she spoke about the need for the Council to ask the Government to respect human rights. We strongly agree with her and we share the concerns that she has expressed and that Special Representative Zerrougui has expressed about human rights violations and abuses committed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In particular with regard to the increase in sexual exploitation and abuse, we call for all those allegations to be swiftly investigated and for those responsible for them to be brought swiftly to justice.

The Secretary-General also made a recommendation about the need for all parties to respect the 31 December 2016 political agreement and the rule of law. Again, we strongly agree with that. We welcome the limited progress so far and the steps taken by the Government towards organizing the elections, especially when it comes to voter registration. At the same time, we continue to be very concerned over the lack of progress in the implementation of the confidence-building measures in the 31 December 2016 political agreement. We call on all parties to remain committed to the agreement, including by respecting fundamental rights and the electoral timeline, not just with words but also with actions.

In two of the recommendations, the Secretary-General calls on us, as the Council, to do more to promote women's participation in politics and to materially support the organizations that do so. Again, we very much agree with those. As the Council, we all made clear when we adopted resolution 1325 (2000) that women needed to be encouraged to meaningfully participate in all stages of the peace process, and that youth also needed to be engaged. We are therefore very concerned to hear of the increase in sexual violence. I am concerned by the points raised about the impact of the electoral law on women's participation and also by the point made by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui about the shortage of women candidates that have so far been declared. We are very concerned by all of that, and we all need to work together to do more to encourage women's participation.

Finally, the Secretary-General makes some very specific points about the role of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). We take those concerns very seriously. I am not able to give a detailed response to each of them right now, but we will certainly take away those points and reflect on them. We welcome the important role that MONUSCO is playing in helping to prepare for the elections so far; however, as with other speakers, we note that challenges remain and we continue to call for cooperation between the Independent National Electoral Commission and MONUSCO as we prepare for those elections. I thank the Secretary-General for those five very clear recommendations.

In conclusion, we believe that it is vital that the Council remain closely engaged on the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the coming months in the

run-up to the elections. Like Ethiopia, we support plans for a Council visit later this year. We must continue to urge all parties to abide by the Constitution, to respect the 31 December agreement and to take concrete steps on the ground to create an environment for free and fair elections.

Mr. Radomski (Poland): I would like to begin by extending my thanks to Special Representative Leila Zerrougui, Ambassador of Kuwait Mansour Ayyad Alotaibi and Ms. Justine Masika Bihamba for their important and very informative briefings.

The upcoming months will be critical in preserving all efforts made by international, regional and national actors in stabilizing the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Poland commends the progress made in the technical preparations of the elections. However, we are still deeply concerned by the distrust among political actors over several crucial issues, mainly the implementation of the confidence-building measures and opening of the political space. A lack of genuine commitment and goodwill on the part of all the political actors might undermine the free and credible electoral process. Poland calls upon the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to ensure that the elections are organized on time and with the requisite conditions of transparency, inclusivity and security.

In that context, we emphasize the importance of the timely invitation of international electoral observers. The peaceful and timely transfer of power in January 2019, as set out in the electoral calendar and in accordance with the Congolese Constitution, is a prerequisite for the stabilization of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Poland welcomes the commitment by regional partners to support the electoral process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

While praising the efforts taken by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and international actors to contain the Ebola virus outbreak, we remain gravely concerned about the humanitarian situation, which is driven by the destabilizing actions of foreign and domestic armed groups. Their activities, including violence against civilians, illicit trafficking, trade exploitation and smuggling of natural resources, have a negative impact on the security, economy and development of the country. We therefore call for the full implementation of the arms embargo, travel ban and assets freeze, as they are an integral part of the fight against those type of crimes. Poland is also worried by the continuing increase in human rights abuses, including sexual violations. We call upon the Government to strengthen measures to improve security, fight the impunity of the perpetrators of those crimes and protect victims.

In conclusion, let me reiterate Poland's support for the recommendations proposed by the Secretary-General in his report (S/2018/655). We praise the important work carried out by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Special Representative Leila Zerrougui. There is no doubt that in the wake of the upcoming elections the role of the Mission is ever more important.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the convening of this meeting and for the important briefings delivered by Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Ambassador Mansour Alotaibi and Ms. Justine Masika Bihamba.

Peru notes with concern the grave security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, particularly in the east of the country, as well as the humanitarian crisis affecting millions of Congolese. We deplore and condemn the human rights violations, including sexual violence, that are occurring in increasing numbers in the country, as we have heard this morning.

In such a complex scenario, we would first like to underscore the importance of creating an atmosphere of trust, transparency, credibility and inclusion with a view to ensuring a safe and mass turnout of citizens and all political forces in the current electoral process, as well as the peaceful recognition of its results. We highlight the efforts made by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in that regard, which are focused on complying with the electoral calendar and completing the audit of voter registration, with the support of the International Organization of la Francophonie. In addition, we consider it urgent to deepen the following five main lines of action.

First, confidence-building must continue, in accordance with the measures set forth in the political agreement of 31 December 2016 to guarantee the free participation of all political forces and their candidates.

Secondly, the security of all political actors and their supporters must be guaranteed, including commitments among all forces and measures to prevent

acts of intimidation and neutralize divisive rhetoric and incitement to violence.

Thirdly, verification of the functioning of the voting machines is recommended, in order to ensure that it is not possible to manipulate the results. That should be done through due coordination with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the participation of the opposition and civil society.

Fourthly, adequate financing of the process must be ensured, and the needs for support from MONUSCO and eventually, the international community must be identified in a timely manner.

Fifthly, it is important for the Government to determine the role of the team of international experts and regional and subregional organizations with a view to ensuring their participation and issuing appropriate invitations.

With regard to the security situation, we would like to highlight the important role played by MONUSCO and its joint action with the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo, as well as the Intervention Brigade. We appreciate the success achieved in reducing intercommunal violence and encouraging the return of displaced persons in Ituri and Tanganyika. We note, however, that security is still precarious in South and North Kivu.

Regarding the human rights situation, we consider it necessary for MONUSCO to expand its monitoring role, particularly with regard to the increase in complaints against State agents registered in recent months. The authorities must cooperate with the investigations and punish those responsible.

Regarding the humanitarian situation, we deem it essential to strengthen the cooperation of the United Nations, the African Union and other humanitarian agencies and cooperating sources, based on an immediate support strategy. We highlight the coordination with the World Health Organization to control the Ebola outbreak. In addition to the electoral process, it is essential to address the root causes of the crisis. This means promoting sustainable development, improving the governance of agriculture, generating rural employment and preventing the exploitation of natural resources, among other urgent measures required to build sustainable peace.

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands) (*spoke in French*): I thank the three briefers for their statements highlighting the many facets of the ongoing crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I am especially proud to see Ms. Jutsine Masika Bihamba among us today. She was the first winner of our national human rights champions prize. Her presence here highlights yet again the gratitude of the international community for her important work in the fight against sexual violence and on behalf of the protection of civilians, women and children in particular.

On behalf of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, I would like to address three points today: first, the electoral process; secondly, the current humanitarian and security situation; and thirdly, the crucial role of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in the coming months.

Concerning the electoral process, last week the Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council urged the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to guarantee the holding of elections on 23 December. Progress is certainly being made in legislative and technical preparations, but the confidence of many stakeholders in the process is low. A year and a half has passed since the New Year's Eve agreement. The Council and the regional and international stakeholders have repeatedly called for the full implementation of the confidence-building measures.

There is a great deal of work left to do. More than 100 political prisoners remain imprisoned. The harassment, intimidation and threats faced by many members of civil society organizations and parties must stop. The total ban on demonstrations has not been lifted. The political space is shrinking. The participation of women in elections is another aspects that requires our attention and support. The Democratic Republic of the Congo cannot afford to hold elections that lack credibility. The women and men of the Democratic Republic of the Congo aspire to a credible transfer of power, in line with the Constitution, the New Year's Eve agreement and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. We must see significant progress.

We take note of the fact that the Democratic Republic of the Congo has postponed the visit of the Secretary-General and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission that was scheduled for earlier this

month. We hope that a new date can be fixed quickly. Cancellation could diminish the confidence of the international community and the Congolese people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's commitment to the New Year's Eve agreement. The Security Council must continue to monitor the situation and remain closely involved, including through a possible visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

My second point concerns the current humanitarian and security situation. Elections are just one piece of the puzzle. The humanitarian situation remains extremely worrying. Three months ago, the donor community pledged $500 million for emergency assistance. The Democratic Republic of the Congo has announced the creation of a humanitarian forum and fund. Millions of Congolese, however, urgently need humanitarian measures right. Hunger, massive internal displacement and health risks are heightening the threats to their security. It is a vicious circle. Armed groups and their ravages are growing. They terrorize vulnerable communities, attack units of the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo, and kill peacekeepers. While security has improved in Ituri and Tanganyika provinces, it has further declined in North and South Kivu provinces. The situation in some parts of Kasai remains serious.

It is women and children who pay the highest price, including due to systematic sexual violence, the recruitment of child soldiers, sexual slavery and impediments to humanitarian assistance. The Council cannot remain a passive observer. It must act, including through the sanctions regime, and put an end to the impunity of those whose involvement in these practices has been proven.

My third point concerns the role of MONUSCO. The challenges are complex and numerous. The Mission's mandate is to protect civilians and to support the implementation of the New Year's Eve agreement and the electoral process. These two priorities require the full political commitment of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, clarity concerning the demands and the expectations of MONUSCO, as well as the full support of the Council. We are concerned that a further deterioration in the security situation would pose a real challenge to the implementation of the mandate.

I congratulate the Special Representative and her team for their ongoing adjustments and responses to multiple threats in the most difficult circumstances. The protection through projection approach will require continuous and enormous efforts if it is to bear fruit. The Secretary-General's letter on emergency planning (S/2018/727) emphasizes that fact once again.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo has many partners willing to help, listen and contribute to strengthening the country's security and stability. The situation deserves our full attention. There must be no doubt about our commitment or our willingness to act. Time is pressing.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), for the quality of her briefing.

We also thank Ambassador Mansour Alotaibi, Chairman of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for his excellent work at the head of that body, and Ms. Justine Masika Bihamba, head of the the non-governmental organization Synergy of Women for Victims of Sexual Violence, whose briefing painted a comprehensive picture of this issue.

Five months ahead of the presidential, legislative and provincial elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, my delegation welcomes the progress made by the Independent National Electoral Commission in the implementation of the electoral process, including the finalization of the electoral lists and their audit by the experts of the International Organization of la Francophonie; the enactment of law on the distribution of seats in the future Parliament and the electoral law; the end of the regisatrion period for provincial elections candidacies; and the opening of the registration period for candidacies to the presidential and legislative elections.

My country urges all Congolese political actors to be part of this positive dynamic by creating conditions conducive to the holding of peaceful elections, in accordance with the recommendation of the joint communiqué issued at the meeting of the United Nations Security Council and the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, held on 19 July in New York. Côte d'Ivoire also notes the commitment of the Congolese authorities to organizing the elections in due time and to ensure their financing. It encourages them

to take appropriate measures with a view to ensuring the availability of the necessary resources in order to avoid delays likely to jeopardize the proper implementation of the electoral calendar.

Despite the positive momentum that has been observed in the implementation of the electoral timetable, my delegation remains alarmed by the socio-political and security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. On the socio-political front, given the opening of the registration period for presidential election candidacies, a key stage in the electoral process, my delegation encourages the Congolese authorities to lift the prohibition on public demonstrations and to create political conditions conducive to the expression of fundamental individual and collective freedoms. This recommendation is justified by the fact that no incidents were reported during the public demonstrations organized by political groups.

Côte d'Ivoire notes also a persistent divergence of views among the Congolese stakeholders, specifically rejection of the use of voting machines and the conclusions of the voter register audit by certain political parties and civil-society organizations. In this regard, Côte d'Ivoire strongly encourages the Congolese authorities, all political actors and the relevant civil-society organizations jointly to seek satisfactory compromises so as to ensure the holding of credible and peaceful elections on 23 December, as planned.

At the security level, the deterioration of the situation as a consequence of the activities of armed groups in North and South Kivu and their nefarious effects on the civilian population, specifically the deterioration of the humanitarian situation, remain a source of concern to my delegation. In this context, we welcome the efforts undertaken by the Congolese armed forces and MONUSCO to tackle the threat posed by armed groups. We encourage its forces to further shore up their joint operations to stabilize those provinces experiencing insecurity. My delegation further notes with satisfaction the commitment undertaken by donors during the 13 April international humanitarian conference held in Geneva to earmark $528 million in support of humanitarian operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

My delegation welcomes the commitment of MONUSCO, which, in cooperation with the country's authorities, has been lending technical support to the Independent National Electoral Commission and has contributed, thanks to its good offices, to a reduction in intercommunal tensions in violence-plagued areas.

To conclude, Côte d'Ivoire calls on subregional, regional and international organizations, specifically the Southern African Development Community, the Economic Community of Central African States, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the African Union, the European Union, the International Organization of la Francophonie and the United Nations to synergize their actions in support of their support for the implementation of the 31 December 2016 agreement.

Mr. Temenov (Kazakhstan): We join others in thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui for her highly informative update. We would also like to thank Ambassador Mansour Alotaibi, Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Ms. Bihamba, civil-society representative, for their insightful briefings.

Regarding the political situation, the delegation of Kazakhstan agrees on the importance of the presidential and legislative elections scheduled for 23 December being held in a timely, free and credible manner. Although commendable efforts have been made by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to reach key electoral milestones, challenges remain to be addressed. We commend the International Organization of la Francophonie (IOF) on having conducting an independent audit of the voter register and note the importance of the implementation by the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo of the relevant recommendations.

We must support all confidence-building measures provided in the 31 December 2016 agreement among all political actors. It is critical to ensure an inclusive political transition of power that is based on respect for fundamental rights, including the full participation of women. We note the role of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), the African Union and IOF in supporting the vital electoral process.

The security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is deteriorating in some parts of the country owing to the increasing activities of armed groups in North and South Kivu, which have resulted in a high death toll among innocent civilians and

selfless peacekeepers. We support the reconfiguration of MONUSCO so as to enable it to better address security issues as well as ensure greater local community outreach and expanded measures under the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme, together with a comprehensive approach to the protection of civilians.

We agree with previous speakers that the increasing number of documented cases of conflict-related sexual violence committed against women and children requires immediate attention and action. An increase in State authority and reliable security and law-enforcement systems throughout the country are crucial in order to reinforce the capabilities of the Forces armées de la République Démocratique du Congo and of MONUSCO.

With regard to the humanitarian situation, we express concern at the humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is cause for alarm given that the number of people in need of assistance and protection is the highest thus far. We welcome the results of the donor conference held in Geneva and call on donors to fulfil their pledges to effectively address the dire humanitarian situation.

As the recent Ebola outbreak has exacerbated the suffering of the people, we commend the swift and coordinated response by the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with support from MONUSCO and the United Nations system, to save lives and contain the spread of this lethal and highly contagious virus.

Finally, we welcome the outcome of the twelfth annual joint consultative meeting held in New York on 19 July, at which the members of the Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council stepped up cooperation between the two sides. This fresh momentum for enhanced cooperation must continue in order to collectively address existing complexities together with regional and international partners. This will enable us to consolidate the gains achieved and move forward towards the key goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the AU's Agenda 2063. We will therefore have many best practices for the Silencing the Guns by 2020 strategy that can be shared with others in the region.

Kazakhstan stands ready to work with others to bring stability to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which will have a positive impact on the wider region.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to express our gratitude for the briefings that we heard from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Ms. Leila Zerrougui; Ambassador Mansour Alotaibi of Kuwait in his capacity as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and Ms. Justine Masika Bihamba.

We welcome the ongoing progress and commitment demonstrated by the Democratic Republic of the Congo to meet the deadlines set out in the electoral calendar, in particular with respect to the promulgation of the law on the distribution of seats for the national, legislative, provincial and local elections. We welcome also the publication of the list of platforms and political parties. We have taken note of the audit of voter register, which took place in an inclusive atmosphere bringing together members of the Majorité présidentielle, members of civil society and regional and subregional organizations. We therefore hope that all registered voters will be able to cast their ballot in the elections.

We reiterate that to ensure the effective holding of elections leading to a peaceful transfer of power, and in order to ease tensions at the political level, the parties must implement the confidence-building measures enshrined in the 31 December 2016 agreement. We deplore the fact that these measures had not been fully implemented by the deadline, which has passed, and therefore call once again for their full and effective implementation. We believe that the Government and the opposition must work together in order to make headway in such implementation. Although the Government must take the initiative and the leadership role in such implementation, the measures will not be practicable without the participation of the opposition. We therefore appeal to all parties to cooperate in the run-up to the holding of transparent, credible, peaceful and inclusive elections.

We believe that the full and effective participation of women at all stages of the elections, as well as that of young people, is vital, in keeping with the joint communiqué issued by the Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council at their twelfth annual joint consultative meeting, held on 19 July.

On another front, we support the initiatives and good offices of the Special Representative. We welcome her meetings with various stakeholders aimed at allowing for an exchange of views and ensuring a coherent and coordinated approach on the part of the United Nations and regional actors. We also welcome the meetings held with various authorities, political platforms and civil-society groups to discuss the electoral process.

We also commend the support for the Democratic Republic of the Congo provided by regional organizations, such as the Southern African Development Community, the Economic Community of Central African States and the African Union, among others. We encourage them to pursue their efforts, in close cooperation with the Government, to meet the political and security challenges that the country is facing. Similarly, we support the work of MONUSCO, the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region in preparing the holding of elections, and we encourage them to continue their collaborative work with the Independent National Electoral Commission.

We pay tribute to those who gave their lives for the cause of peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We commend MONUSCO's work in connection with measures taken for the protection of civilians. We also welcome its work to reduce violence in areas of the country by implementing projects to reduce community violence, which have led to the return of 800 displaced persons since April. We call for the pursuit of such projects, in conjunction with MONUSCO's efforts aimed at reconciliation among communities and within the framework of the International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy, focusing on stabilization and the restoration of State authority in the country.

The challenges faced by the Democratic Republic of the Congo have increased exponentially, and their solution lies not only in the holding of elections, but also in addressing the root causes of the conflict. One of those is the lack of control over natural resources, which is helping to prolong the crisis, the fragmentation of armed groups and the systematic exploitation of those resources by multinational corporations that operate unchecked and whose revenue can be used to fund continuing instability in the country. Accordingly, we believe that, in order to deal with that issue, achieving control of areas rich in natural resources and their sovereign administration must be an essential goal, in terms of both a cessation of hostilities and economic development. When a country maintains effective control of its resources and there is political will to administer them for the benefit of the population, it is possible to achieve a structural change leading to stabilization and the strengthening of the rule of law.

In that regard, we commend the work of Kuwait, in its capacity as chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and we agree that Committee members must be updated on the efforts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other States to address questions concerning the illegal exploitation and smuggling of natural resources by armed groups and on measures taken to help the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the countries of the region to develop responsible commercial trade in minerals, with the understanding that strategies must be developed leading to the consolidation of peace in the post-electoral process.

We also express our solidarity with the victims of the Ebola outbreak and commend the Congolese authorities, the international community and the World Health Organization for their prompt response to that health crisis. We are concerned about the humanitarian and security crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo caused by armed groups, as well as by increasing intercommunal violence, particularly in the regions of Ituri, Kasai, the Kivus and Tanganyika. We condemn in the strongest terms the many abuses committed against the population. We call on all armed groups to immediately end all forms of violence, including violations and abuses against children, and other destabilizing activities, including the illicit exploitation and trafficking of natural resources. Those groups must immediately and permanently disband, lay down their weapons, reject violence and release the children whom they hold within their ranks.

Lastly, we welcome the cooperation of the international community and other international partners in raising funds to meet humanitarian needs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We call on them to pursue such efforts, in continued cooperation with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in strict respect of its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the floor to speak this time in my national capacity.

First of all, I thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) for her briefing, and I thank Ms. Bihamba for her valuable briefing at the beginning of this meeting.

My statement is a brief one. I will address three key points.

The first concerns the political issue. The political situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has entered a decisive phase, governed by the upcoming legislative and presidential elections. We hope that those elections will be held in a free and impartial way on the agreed date of 23 December, and that all sectors of the Congolese people will be able to participate and vote in accordance with Congolese laws and the Congolese Constitution. The process of rebuilding confidence should be considered among all the Congolese political parties as stipulated in the political agreement of 31 December 2016. We recall here the joint communiqué of the Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council issued on 19 July, which calls on all political parties to work together in that direction.

Second is the security situation. The ongoing violence and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, particularly in the South Kivu and North Kivu regions, which had seen military escalation and attacks over the past few months, requires an immediate and serious response, given that the armed conflicts there directly affect unarmed civilians and drain the natural and human resources of the country. In that regard, we commend the significant efforts of MONUSCO and its members to withstand and repel those attacks. We call on all parties behind the conflict and violence to end those clashes so as to spare the lives of civilians and achieve the desired stability in the security sector.

Third is the humanitarian situation. The ongoing humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a major concern. Nearly 13 million people, including displaced persons and refugees, are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. The international community should offer them significant assistance in meeting their humanitarian needs and finding appropriate solutions to mitigate the suffering of those in humanitarian need.

With regard to the Ebola virus, which several colleagues have mentioned, there is fear that it will spread in Equateur province. We welcome the announcement by the Ministry for Health of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on Tuesday that the spread of this epidemic is now under control. We commend the tireless efforts of the Government, together with the United Nations, the World Health Organization and MONUSCO, to eliminate this disease.

Mr. Zhang Dianbin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui; Ambassador Alotaibi and Ms. Bihamba for their briefings.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo occupies an important geographical location, and its peace, stability and political process also attract the broad attention of the international community, in particular the countries of the region. Currently, the country is facing security and political challenges. The Security Council should therefore assess the impact of various factors on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and help the Congolese Government to strengthen its security capacity-building and provide constructive assistance, with an emphasis on seeking African solutions to African problems.

China maintains that a political solution is the only way to resolve the issues of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Regional and subregional organizations, including the African Union and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, and countries of the region, are most familiar with the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the surrounding areas. The Security Council should continue to support them in playing a leading role in mediation and encourage organizations and countries of the region to enhance communication and engagement with Congolese parties through their respective channels. In particular, we should focus on listening to the views of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and respecting its ownership of the political process, as well as encouraging all the parties to take concrete action in order to get back on a path to a political settlement through dialogue and consultation, with a view to effectively implementing the political agreement of 31 December 2016. The international community should work to address the root causes of the

conflict and help the country to deal with its social and economic development issues, focusing on increased investment in the areas of education, agriculture and infrastructure construction.

The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo plays an important role in maintaining peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. China commends the courage and dedication of the peacekeepers, who are risking their lives as they work to deliver on their mandate. The international community should improve its peacekeeping capacity-building through bilateral and multilateral cooperation in order to ensure peacekeepers' safety and security.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for her update on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as on the implementation of the political agreement of 31 December 2016 and the country's preparations for elections.

We have taken note of the Secretary-General's latest report on the development of events in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2018/655) and we definitely share his opinion that ensuring that the elections scheduled for 23 December are held on time will help to reduce the tensions in Congolese society. In that regard, we would like to draw attention to President Kabila's recent address to the National Assembly, in which the leader of the Democratic Republic of the Congo once again affirmed his determination to abide by the Constitution, which we see as an appropriate and timely sign. We would like to see the opposition forces reject their negative agenda too.

We note the importance of working to ensure that the Independent National Electoral Commission's electoral calendar and revised voting dates are adhered to. That will require support for the electoral process from the international community, including by using the logistical capabilities of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). We note the measures that Kinshasa has taken with regard to the technical and legislative preparations for voting, including the timely enactment of laws on the distribution of seats in the provincial legislatures and local councils and the publication of a definitive list of the political parties and associations permitted to participate in the elections. It is important that the process of auditing the voter register is being conducted under the auspices of the International Organization of la Francophonie, and in our view the fact that half of the country's political parties have signed the electoral code of conduct is a positive development.

However, we would urge our colleagues on the Security Council not to make an issue of the decision taken by the National Electoral Commission to use electronic voting machines. This is not about an electronic vote count, as many have mistakenly said. The equipment is to be used only to make preparing and printing the ballot papers considerably easier, while the vote count will still be done manually, as our colleagues from the Democratic Republic of the Congo have assured us more than once. We agree that in order to avoid problems, Kinshasa should provide stable financing for the election preparations and strengthen the coordination of its work with MONUSCO.

We do not deny the importance of ensuring that the authorities mobilize to implement confidence-building measures, including on the emblematic cases referred to in the political agreement regarding political actors who are outside the country. However, we urge all the country's opposition forces to cooperate with Kinshasa and the Electoral Commission and to avoid any demonstrations of violence. We also consider it crucial to ensure respect for the sovereignty and legislature of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We believe that the role of the United Nations Mission in the organization and conduct of elections should not go beyond the framework of the mandate outlined in resolution 2409 (2018). The protection of civilians in the context of the elections should be carried out with full respect for the basic principles of peacekeeping and without any interference in Kinshasa's internal affairs. In particular, under no circumstances should MONUSCO take any action that could be interpreted as support for a specific Congolese party. We believe that the citizens of the Democratic Republic of the Congo must decide their own destiny, while the international community's job is to assist them in areas where their help is genuinely solicited. It is also important to remember that the elections themselves are no panacea. It is vital not to lose sight of the importance of resolving the underlying causes of the crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The President: I will now make a brief statement in my capacity as the representative of Sweden.

I want to thank Ms. Zerrougui and Ambassador Alotaibi for their briefings and, not least, to say a special word of thanks to Ms. Bihamba, our civil-society briefer today. Her remarks to the Council highlight not only the challenges that the women of the Democratic Republic of the Congo face but also their resilience, and her reflection here of women's desire and determination to be agents of change in their communities and their country. She also made some very relevant and pertinent recommendations.

The elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo planned for 23 December represent an essential step on the path to resolving the political challenges facing the country. Last week in New York, the Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council discussed the situation as part of their twelfth annual joint consultative meeting. The communiqué issued following that meeting (SC/13430), as well as the most recent statement by the African Union, the Southern African Development Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the United Nations on the Peace and Security Cooperation Framework, send a clear signal and demonstrate the international consensus on the need to hold credible and inclusive elections on 23 December in line with the Congolese Constitution and the intra-Congolese agreement of 31 December 2016. The confidence-building measures are especially important, given the importance of increasing trust and confidence in the process among all the parties.

The humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains dire and extremely worrying. The outbreak of Ebola virus disease in Equateur province on 8 May presented the communities affected with an additional major challenge. We commend the successful management by the Government and its international partners of the outbreak, which was declared at an end earlier this week. We encourage the same commitment from international partners with regard to their support for humanitarian action in the Democratic Republic of the Congo through the 2018 humanitarian response plan. The needs are growing, while only 21 per cent of the response plan's requirements has been met. For the country's 7.7 million food-insecure people and 2.2 million acutely malnourished children, every dollar counts. We encourage everyone to try to do more.

With the already appalling levels of human rights violations and abuse, we are deeply concerned about the increasing number of violations being reported in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including an increased incidence of sexual and gender-based violence, as Ms. Bihamba has already told us. The high percentage of violations attributed to State agents is particularly worrying. Accountability for such crimes is essential, both to ensure justice for the survivors and to promote change by ending impunity. We urge the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with the support of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to continue to strengthen efforts in that regard.

Sixteen months after the fact, the murders of Zaida Catalán and Michael Sharp, two United Nations experts reporting to the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, remain unsolved. We fully support the work of the United Nations and the follow-on mechanism established by the Secretary-General and led by Mr. Robert Petit. We reiterate the need for the Congolese authorities to improve their cooperation with him and his team. It is important that the Sanctions Committee and the Security Council continue to follow developments in the matter closely until the truth has been established and the perpetrators have been held accountable. We are grateful to the Chair of the Committee for all his work, including the recurring Sanctions Committee meetings on the follow-up mechanism.

The year 2018 is a crucial one for the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Credible, transparent, inclusive and peaceful elections can contribute to lasting peace and stability. It is essential that the Council and the region continue to stand united and work with the Government to support the people of the country in the exercise of their democratic rights.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Gata Mavita Wa Lufuta (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): It is an honour and a pleasure to congratulate you, Mr. President, as your presidency of the Council is drawing to a close, and to express my delegation's esteem and appreciation for the leadership, expertise and efficiency with which you have

conducted the work of the Security Council this month. My delegation would also like to take this opportunity to once again thank you and the other members of the Council for your availability and the unfailing interest you have always shown in my country's situation.

My delegation takes note of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/655) on the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) submitted for the Council's consideration and thanks Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for introducing it. While we appreciate the value of the report's content, I would like to take this opportunity to focus on three points that my delegation considers particularly important to clarify for the Security Council. I will therefore discuss the political, security and humanitarian situations in turn.

As highlighted in paragraph 2 of the Secretary-General's report, the political situation in my country continues to be dominated by preparations for the elections, which are due to take place on 23 December. In this respect, it should be stressed that the process is coming along well. After the closing of the audit of the voter register, the Independent National Electoral Commission proceeded to clean it up by eliminating duplicate registrations, reducing the number of voters on the rolls to 40 million. It then made the electoral calendar public before launching an awareness and education campaign on technical and operational issues, with the aim of building trust, removing doubts and maintaining contact with the various stakeholders in the process for credible, transparent and inclusive elections.

One of the issues in this campaign has revolved around the machines that will be used to print the ballot papers. It is important to point out here that the machines will not be voting for the voters but will simply print the ballots that the voters will put into the ballot boxes themselves. The political parties and groupings from both the opposition and the majority, as well as civil society, have all participated in this campaign. In the same context, Parliament has enacted various complementary legal provisions associated with the process, including one on the distribution of seats. For its part, the International Organization of la Francophonie audited the electoral register and made recommendations for its improvement and reliability. The process is now at the candidacy-filing stage. Candidacy filings for the provincial elections were submitted between 24 June and 8 July. So far, the Electoral Commission has received 19,437 applications. For the parliamentary and presidential elections, candidacy filings started yesterday, Wednesday, 25 July, and will continue until 8 August.

While under our Constitution it is the job of the Independent National Electoral Commission to organize the electoral process, the success of this undertaking also depends on the proper handling of disputes by the courts and tribunals. In order to ensure that the courts are as well prepared as possible to handle the task properly, the Superior Council of Magistrates and the Electoral Commission organized, with the financial support of the Government, the United Nations Development Programme/*Projet d'appui au cycle électoral au Congo* and the American Bar Association, a capacity-building workshop for training magistrates on the management of electoral litigation. The workshop brought together a significant sample of judges from courts across the country.

It has always been my Government's desire to hold good elections in a peaceful atmosphere. That presupposes the commitment of all political actors from both the majority and the opposition, who must refrain from comments and attitudes likely to create a climate of tension and provoke disorder. Now that the electoral process is sufficiently advanced and is in the final stretch, my Government expects all the country's political actors, from every political wing, to demonstrate the best possible attitude of constructive support to the process through positive action. We also expect the same from our international partners, who are often conspicuous for their interference from all sides.

In this regard, my Government appreciates the support and assistance of such regional partners as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), whose Electoral Council has just made a working visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This visit, a prelude to the SADC Heads of State and Government meeting to be held in August, enabled the Electoral Commission and SADC's Electoral Council to acknowledge the progress made in the electoral process and discuss the implementation of the logistical prerequisites for the success of the elections, regarding which we informed the SADC delegation about our acquisition and deployment of various materials from China, South Korea and South Africa.

With regard to de-escalating the political situation, we do not think that it would be useful to repeat explanations that the Council has already heard many times. What is important to note, in our humble opinion, is that the Government has already taken a series of steps to meet the requirements set out in the political agreement of 31 December 2016 regarding the release of so-called political prisoners. Those who were in this category have in fact been released. The only situation that is still pending and under the courts' jurisdiction is that concerning the so-called emblematic cases. As we have already pointed out in several statements to the Council, it should be pointed out that the persons concerned in these cases have all been charged with offences under ordinary law. The Council will agree that we cannot ask the public authorities, who are supposed to promote the rule of law and the equality of citizens before the law, to interfere in such situations without violating the Constitution by creating a two-tier justice system in the country.

Finally, I cannot close this chapter without pointing out, with regard to the financing of the electoral process, that for the Government of my country, as everywhere else in the world, elections are a matter of national sovereignty. As a result, they can be financed only by the Government, which is why my country has decided to finance them on its own. As the Electoral Commission informed the SADC Electoral Council, those of our partners who would like to help can do so by providing logistical assistance to the Commission in the form of aircraft, rolling stock and operational facilities.

With regard to the security situation, the report under consideration brings up the situation in the eastern part of the country and, more specifically, in North and South Kivu, with the ongoing presence of the Allied Democratic Forces and the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, as well as other emerging armed groups. My Government is concerned about the situation and has not stood idly by. We remain committed to ending the insecurity in that part of the country. My Government's engagement has restored calm in Tanganyika province, where there were clashes between Bantus and Pygmies, and Ituri province, where the violence that had forced people to flee to Uganda have been defused. However, the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) are continuing their operations to eliminate the negative forces that are still active in North and South Kivu.

As we have always underscored in our various statements to the Council, combating foreign and national armed groups in that part of our country demands the joint efforts of my Government and the United Nations if we are to eliminate them completely. In that regard, the Council has always stressed the importance of cooperation between MONUSCO and the FARDC. In the same vein, at the MONUSCO mandate renewal in March (see S/PV.8216), my Government requested that the Intervention Brigade become operational. We regret to say that in the four months since then, the situation has not improved. Besides that, we all know that the armed groups' get their income, arms and ammunition primarily through the illicit exploitation and plundering of natural resources, and we also all know that those natural resources pass through neighbouring countries or multinational corporations based in those countries and elsewhere. Apart from the measures taken by my Government, it is important that the Council take appropriate steps not only to deter the beneficiaries of this illicit trade but also to help break up and eliminate the armed groups.

With regard to the issue of sexual violence, without going into it to deeply, I would like to note that my Government will continue its efforts to combat that scourge.

Given the sporadic pockets of violence throughout the country and the consequences of the displacement of the population, along with the armed conflicts in neighbouring countries that have brought a flood of refugees into our country, it is perfectly understandable that the Democratic Republic of the Congo is experiencing a difficult humanitarian situation. However, it is not as acute as some have been led to believe. During its session on 30 March, the Government registered 231,346 internally displaced persons in 79 sites spread throughout our country. In order to address the situation, we have established a national humanitarian solidarity fund and set up a humanitarian response programme for rehabilitation and development. It goes without saying that any support that international partners would like to give us to assist people in need is welcome. Also in connection with the humanitarian situation, we should point out that our country had to once again deal with an Ebola epidemic, which has just ended. My Government was grateful for the assistance provided by the World Health Organization and non-governmental medical organizations in responding to the epidemic.

I should not conclude without once again thanking the Council on behalf of the people and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for its tireless efforts to restore peace in my country. I would like to reassure the Council of my country's commitment to holding elections in accordance with the electoral calendar. Since the elections cannot be changed, my Government calls on all stakeholders, in good faith, to denounce any act, regardless of whether it is perpetrated by Congolese or foreigners, that could derail the process, and on those who are still doubters to have a positive and constructive attitude to the process. The situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is often deliberately exaggerated by the media. It is up to the Security Council to support us in following through with the process, which is the only way we can achieve the peace and stability that are the purpose of consolidating democracy in my country.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8319

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8319th meeting
Thursday, 26 July 2018, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Skoog	(Sweden)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mrs. Mele Colifa
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Michon
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Almunayekh
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Mr. Radomski
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

Identical letters dated 19 January 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Colombia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council (S/2016/53)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia (S/2018/723)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

18-23988 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Identical letters dated 19 January 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Colombia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council (S/2016/53)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia (S/2018/723)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Colombia to participate in today's meeting.

On behalf of the Security Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Óscar Adolfo Naranjo Trujillo, Vice-President of Colombia.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Jean Arnault, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/723, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia.

I now give the floor to Mr. Arnault.

Mr. Arnault: I appreciate this opportunity to present to members of the Security Council the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/723) on the peace process in Colombia covering the past four months, which coincide with the conclusion of the mandate of President Juan Manuel Santos.

It is an honour to share once again the floor with Vice-President Oscar Naranjo Trujillo, who, throughout this period, along with High Commissioner for Peace Rodrigo Rivera and other members of the Government, has been at the forefront of efforts to press forward with the implementation of the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace, and to provide as firm a foundation as possible upon which the next Government can build.

The Vice-President and the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia have developed a good working method, establishing common quarterly priorities with regard to issues under United Nations verification, and applying our respective resources and leverage to meet those goals. Progress may have been partial and delays have occurred, but we have been more successful in pushing implementation working together than we would have been working separately.

We are ready to adopt the same collaborative approach with the incoming administration of President-elect Iván Duque Márquez. As an example of our common work during the past quarter, we have put special emphasis on applying a gender approach more forcefully in the reintegration of former combatants and in the security guarantees for communities, with some positive results, which are reflected in the Secretary-General's report.

Since the report of the Secretary-General was issued, on 20 July, Colombia's Independence Day, the new Congress was inaugurated. It includes representatives of the political party the Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (FARC), and its procedures are aligned with the Law on the Status of the Opposition — a key part of the peace-related legislation adopted earlier this year that provides for a more level playing field between the majority and the opposition in all elected assemblies. The Law guarantees, among other provisions, the presence of the opposition in the governing bodies of both Chambers. The presence of the political party FARC fulfils one of the core objectives of the Final Peace Agreement, and this Congress is among the more diverse, plural and representative in the country's legislative history. Within our mandate, we are ready and willing to cooperate with all its members.

That is not the only achievement of the past month. Special recognition must be given to the work of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace. The Peace Agreement recognized the deep aspiration of Colombian society to truth and justice, along with the termination of the conflict. Unfortunately, the long delays involved in the establishment of the Jurisdiction and the adoption of its normative framework created, within public opinion, a lingering sense that truth and justice were somehow overshadowed by the political process.

The first hearings held by the Peace Jurisdiction on 10 and 13 July involving a former army general and the former general commander of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) were therefore extremely important to start dispelling the perception of impunity. The pursuit of accountability through the Jurisdiction and the Commission on Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition will continue to be critical to the legitimacy of the peace process.

Time will tell, but the positive response from victims and the recent decision of senior army officers to voluntarily accept the jurisdiction of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace are an indication that the Colombian peace process may well be close to striking the right balance between the demands of peace and justice — a balance that, as those present know, has been elusive, more often than not, in the negotiated settlement of armed conflicts. The international community should therefore maintain its support for the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, the Truth Commission and the Special Unit for the Search for Persons.

I would also like to bring into relief the national pact of repudiation of violence against social leaders, which was signed by President Santos and President-elect Duque, among others. It is the first time that violence against social leaders is received with such a strong sense of outrage, expressed in the streets of Colombia and cities abroad, in the halls of national institutions and across the political spectrum. In the polarized context of a protracted electoral campaign and in a society at times indifferent to developments in the zones of conflict, that national consensus against attacks on social leaders is significant.

As mentioned in the Secretary-General's report, the most important measures provided in the Peace Agreement for improving the security of communities have begun to be implemented, even if their impact to date is clearly insufficient. We hope that this consensus and sense of urgency on the part of Colombian society will give momentum to the implementation of those measures and will galvanize the efforts of the justice system to prosecute those responsible for these attacks.

Supporting institutions in their efforts to curb violence in the territories will remain a top priority for the Mission. We very much hope that a similar consensus can be forged around the central challenge for consolidating peace — that is, to address the combination of poverty, violence and illegal economies to which inhabitants of the zone of conflict continue to be subjected. A tightly coordinated and well-resourced effort by State institutions, in cooperation with the affected communities and their organizations, will be required to bring the rule of law, security and legal productive opportunities to areas that have long been prey to violence and State neglect. I would therefore like to echo the Secretary-General's report and call for dialogue and cooperation among the new national Government, local authorities, social organizations and civil society in the territories. We believe that such dialogue and cooperation are a prerequisite for success.

While the participation of FARC representatives in the Congress is a major step, the reintegration into civilian life of former FARC-EP members is unfinished business. The Secretary-General has underlined in past reports the difficult environment in which that reintegration is taking place. Completing the work started by the current Government will no doubt require dedication and resources, but fulfilling the guarantees given to those who have laid down their weapons and now undergo the difficult transition to civilian life is essential for Colombia. It is also essential for Colombia to be a source of motivation for parties to conflicts elsewhere in the world.

In concluding, let me express the Mission's appreciation to the Government of President Santos, the leadership of FARC, Colombia's institutions and civil society, who have welcomed us and cooperated generously with our work during the past two years. As the new authorities take office, they can count on the support of this Mission as they take on the hard work of consolidating peace and achieving reconciliation.

The President: I thank Mr. Arnault for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council wishing to make statements.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): Let me begin by welcoming His Excellency Vice-President Óscar Naranjo Trujillo back to the Council, and allow me also to thank him warmly for the personal leadership he has shown in implementing the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace and in working very closely with the United Nations and the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia. I would also like to thank Special Representative Arnault for his briefing today and for all the excellent work he and his team have carried out in recent months.

The United Kingdom welcomes the congressional and presidential elections held between March and June, which were the least violence and most inclusive in Colombia for decades. On behalf of the British Government, I would like to congratulate President-elect Iván Duque Márquez on his electoral victory and also Vice-President-elect Marta Ramirez — the first woman to take up that office in Colombia. For the first time in a generation, elections were not dominated by the conflict but defined by campaigns about issues affecting ordinary people.

We also warmly welcome another remarkable milestone brought about by the peace process. For the first time, the Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (FARC) participated in elections and, last Friday, joined the new Congress.

The speed of the transition continues to surprise and inspire all who follow this journey, but as with all such transitions the challenges remain considerable, and as the special representative has just said, the 2018 elections mark the beginning of a new phase of consolidating the peace process and broadening its ownership to all constituencies. Dialogue and cooperation will continue to be an essential part of that work and FARC's presence in Congress will enable its voice to join others in building a consensus about the future.

We commend the statement of President Santos on Friday welcoming the FARC to the Congress and lauding its commitment to working within Colombia's Constitution and democracy. We welcome President-elect Duque's rejection of polarization and his commitment to working for unity.

We recognize the enormity of the achievements in the implementation of the peace agreement to date, but as set out in the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/723), we also recognize the significant work that remains. Although the elections were the most peaceful in recent history, a significant achievement, we are concerned by the security situation in some post-conflict areas, particularly due to the proliferation of illegal armed groups. Violence between these groups has brought new fighting to some areas and displacements, especially in the Pacific coast region. That has claimed the lives of an increasing number of human rights defenders and social activists, who in many cases are targeted because they champion the rights of local communities.

I welcome the steps taken by the Government to reduce that violence, including the recent commitment by both President Santos and President-elect Duque to new special protective measures for social leaders in rural areas. We hope that the measures will help to address that challenge and we welcome the recruitment of more women officers in the National Protection Unit as a positive step.

As the Special Representative mentioned, on social economic reintegration of FARC members, we agree with the priorities that he has set out for the coming months and we hope that the parties will seize the opportunity to inject renewed momentum into improving security and accelerating the reintegration of former combatants, socioeconomic development and crop substitution programmes. I also note that negotiations with the National Liberation Army continue in Cuba. We will welcome any developments that lead to an end to violence.

Let me conclude by paying tribute once more to President Santos, who took the bold step of coming to the Security Council to ask for our support in 2016. His Government started an extraordinary journey that belongs to all Colombians, and the United Kingdom remains committed to supporting them all the way to the end. The Council has been incredibly proud to support Colombia's peace agreement over the past two and half years. In a world where conflicts destroy so many lives and cause untold suffering, Colombia's peace process offers inspiration and hope to us all. We look forward to continuing to work with President-elect Duque and his Government on continued implementation over the months and years ahead to consolidate gains already made for the Colombian people and to continue to inspire peacemakers around the world.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to welcome Vice-President Óscar Naranjo Trujillo to the Council. He has been key in this process, and through him I would like to congratulate President Juan Manuel Santos and his entire Government on their commitment to the peace process in Colombia. We also congratulate Ambassador María Emma Mejía Vélez, who has also made decisive contributions to the process. We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, Mr. Jean Arnault, for his briefing. We reiterate our support for the important tasks he and his team carry out.

On 20 July, Colombia celebrated 208 years as a Republic. It was an opportune moment to acknowledge the country's recent developments, crowned by the most peaceful and inclusive electoral process in decades. We wish to highlight the legacy of peace of the outgoing Administration and the democratic aspiration of the Colombian people. We would like to focus on three aspects of the endeavour that we consider critical and are obviously interconnected — security, reintegration and reconciliation.

Security requires a redoubling of efforts to combat organized crime. We are concerned about its spread due to the limited State presence in remote rural areas previously controlled by the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP). Peru knows well the challenge that drug trafficking poses to security, State institutions and democratic governance, just as it understands the effectiveness of combating the scourge by addressing its root causes with the help of the concerned civilian population. We can thereby promote alternative, comprehensive and sustainable development.

We believe that such development is also important to the process of reintegration, which requires the weaving of a new social fabric. In that process, we must take into account the social and economic dynamics of each region, along with its opportunity. It is also important to promote the participation of the private sector and international cooperation.

Upholding the rule of law is critical to promoting the trust and legitimacy that all society-building requires. In that connection, we welcome the launching of the hearings of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace — a commitment not only to all of the victims, but to all Colombians. In that regard, we welcome the important Pact of repudiation of violence against social leaders, signed by all Colombian political parties, as well as the massive mobilization of Colombian citizens against such violence. The assassination of leaders, activists and ex-combatants must cease and be subject to the investigations and criminal prosecution that the Colombian institutions have the power to carry out. That is also important in order to promote reconciliation. On that point, we note the importance of the participation of women and youth, and welcome the increasingly active role of the working group on gender of the National Reintegration Council.

The visit of youth leaders to an ecotourism project of ex-combatants in Miravalle, organized by the Mission, is a good practice that we encourage to be replicated in other locations in Colombia and other conflict situations worldwide, in line with resolution 2419 (2018) on youth, peace and security, adopted by the Council in June.

The benefits of peace are numerous and concrete. Recently, in the Lindosa mountain range in the department of Guaviare, on land previously affected by the conflict, a group of investigators discovered what is considered to be one of the most important samples of cave art in the world, resulting in the establishment of eight protected zones. Like that finding, the peace process seeks to rediscover and showcase a rich past in order to build a more prosperous future. It is a task that faces the natural challenges of a project that is as complex as it is ambitious. Colombia has launched an exemplary national project of maintaining peace and sustaining development.

I conclude by reaffirming Peru's commitment to and support for the Colombian peace process and the Mission deployed by the Council's mandate, at the request of the parties. We have followed the large and complex peace process since its inception and are now a guarantor of the peace agreement and its commitment to all Colombians.

We are convinced that the Security Council will continue to work constructively with the new authorities in the interest of peace and security in Colombia.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): First of all, I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's meeting. I welcome Vice-President Óscar Naranjo Trujillo to the Council and thank Special Representative Arnault for his briefing.

The peace process in Colombia is a fine example of the Council's successful response over recent years to regional hotspot issues through collaborative efforts. It is of crucial importance not only to the achievement of comprehensive peace and development in the country, but also to the maintenance of stability in the region as a whole. China commends the efforts of President Santos, the Colombian Government and all parties concerned in this regard.

In recent months, positive progress has been made in the Colombian peace process, and the presidential elections were held without incident. The Government

and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) have agreed on a strategy for the reintegration of former combatants. Encouraging progress has also been achieved with regard to the ceasefire between the Government and the National Liberation Army. Healing the wounds of war, however, will not be an easy task. The comprehensive implementation of the Peace Agreement requires efforts at the political, security and development levels as well as in the area of social cohesion. As such, it is a long-term project that requires a systematic approach and the sustained efforts of all parties in Colombia as well as members of the international community.

The peace process is irreversible: such is the consensus of the entire Colombian population and the international community. China hopes that all relevant actors in Colombia will remain firmly committed to the peace process, continue to actively implement the Peace Agreement and resolve any issues, as they arise, through dialogue and consultation. The Security Council and the international community should remain seized of the situation and give continued support to the pursuit of peace in Colombia, respect the ownership of the Government and the people of Colombia of the peace process, and provide constructive assistance to facilitate their efforts.

China commends Special Representative Arnault and the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia for their important roles in promoting the peace process. We hope that the Mission will continue to enhance its communication with both the Government and FARC, build mutual confidence and work with both sides for the active implementation of the Peace Agreement.

In closing, let me say that China stands ready to work together with other members of the Council to make its contribution to continued progress in the Colombian peace process and the early achievement of comprehensive peace and stability in the country.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation would like to thank the Swedish presidency for having convened this important meeting on the consideration of the quarterly report on the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia (S/2018/723). We also congratulate Mr. Jean Arnault, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, on his outstanding briefing.

On behalf of the Côte d'Ivoire delegation, I wish a very warm welcome to His Excellency Mr. Óscar Naranjo, Vice-President of the Republic of Colombia, whose presence here today is an honour for us.

The report, which outlines recent developments in the peace process in Colombia, comes at a time when one the main players in that process, President Juan Manuel Santos Calderón, is preparing to hand over power to his successor, Mr. Iván Duque. My delegation commends the various Colombian parties for having met the challenge of holding legislative and presidential elections in a peaceful climate with the participation of all. It also welcomes the resolve of the President-elect to strive to promote the unity of the country and to end the polarization of Colombian society.

My delegation also notes with satisfaction the significant progress made in the legislative sector and in several cross-cutting sectors. At the legislative level, my delegation welcomes the adoption by the Parliament of the rules of procedure on the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, which has begun its work, as well as the authorization given for the holding of a referendum on measures to combat corruption.

Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the efforts made by the Colombian Government to implement the necessary legal guarantees for the reintegration of former Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) combatants. It also welcomes the close cooperation of former FARC-EP leaders with the Truth Commission, which is charged with investigating human rights violations committed during the conflict. The appearance by the head of the People's Alternative Revolutionary Force (FARC), Mr. Rodrigo Londoño, before the Truth Commission on 29 June is an encouraging sign in this respect.

As regards cross-cutting sectors, my delegation is pleased with all efforts to involve young people and to integrate the gender dimension into the peace process, and it welcomes the measures aimed at ensuring the protection of children.

Despite the progress made, the peace process in Colombia remains a source of concern, not only because of the difficulties related to the implementation of the Peace Agreement signed on 24 November 2016 with the FARC-EP, but also the problems encountered in reviewing some crucial provisions of the Peace Agreement. The provisions in question — which relate to the justice procedure, a key component of transitional justice, land issues and the substitution programme — are key areas of the Agreement, whose

implementation is strongly recommended in order to foster trust between the various parties.

My delegation, furthermore, is concerned that some of the developments seen in recent months might undermine the achievements made in the peace process, for example, the arrest for illegal activities of the leader of FARC, Mr. Hernández Solarte, alias Jesus Santrich; attacks against former combatants and members of their families as well as human rights defenders; and uncertainties with respect to the future of the Agreement following the political handover.

Côte d'Ivoire urges the new Colombian leaders to pursue the implementation of the Peace Agreement with FARC and to undertake negotiations with the National Liberation Army in order to create conditions conducive to peace and sustainable development in the country. The new Government should also devise appropriate responses to economic, social, political and security concerns and to the issue of the rule of law in order to give the peace process in Colombia a real chance.

To that end, my delegation believes that in line with the conclusions contained in the report, the challenges that need to be dealt with include the reintegration of former combatants, security guarantees for communities, combating violence in former conflict areas, the proliferation of militias, appropriate measures in the area of the coca economy, and the frustrations and fears of former combatants and of communities that feel excluded from the peace process.

My delegation welcomes the implementation of a national political pact against violence and for the peaceful exercise of politics, now that the Pact of repudiation of violence against social leaders has been endorsed by State institutions, all major political expressions and civil society. Along those same lines, my delegation would encourage the new regime to ensure the protection of community leaders and human rights defenders in order to achieve true political, social and economic inclusion in Colombia. From this standpoint, my country would urge the international community to assist the peace efforts of the Colombian parties.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire expresses its full support for the peace process under way and for the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, and reiterates its readiness to work with the other members of the Security Council for the return and consolidation of peace in Colombia.

Mr. Llorentty Soliz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation would like to echo our colleagues by first of all warmly welcoming the presence here of His Excellency the Vice-President of the Republic of Colombia, Óscar Naranjo, and of the Permanent Representative of Colombia, María Emma Mejía Vélez. They have contributed to writing one of the most outstanding pages of the history of not only Colombia, but also our region. We also welcome the presence of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Jean Arnault, and we thank him for his briefing and for his tireless work on behalf of our Organization in Colombia. We also welcome the presence at this meeting of a number of colleagues from my region — ambassadors who are closely following the progress made on this issue in our work here in the Council.

Since the signing of the final Agreement, in 2016, the peace process in Colombia has yielded positive results that are unprecedented in any other peace process. These include a definitive ceasefire between the Government and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP); the laying down of weapons by FARC-EP; the setting up of a new political party, the People's Alternative Revolutionary Force (FARC), its participation in the 2018 electoral process and the assumption by its representatives of their new legislative posts; and a reduction in the level of violence in the country. According to the Victims Unit, prior to 2012 clashes had led to an estimated 3,000 deaths per year. Since the signing of the agreement in 2017, 78 fatalities have been recorded. Furthermore, it is worth underscoring the significant progress made in the area of humanitarian demining. To date, more than 264 municipalities have been declared mine-free, which represents 40 per cent of the total number of municipalities.

Every situation is different, but if we compare the process at hand with various issues that we deal with daily in the Council, we know from experience that merely consolidating a definitive ceasefire takes years to become a reality. That gives us an idea of how much basic progress has been made thanks to the leadership and the political will of President Juan Manuel Santos Calderón and the FARC. The Government has established institutions and developed an important legal framework aimed at implementing what is, by all accounts, an ambitious peace agreement. The agreement not only establishes an understanding between the

two parties to end the violence, but also offers an opportunity to address the fundamental problems in Colombia comprehensively, and seeks to eliminate the deep and historical differences between rural areas and cities, poverty, inequality and the absence of the State in areas affected by the conflict. That is why continuing the process is a priority.

It should be noted that during the recent holding of elections, as some of my colleagues have mentioned, there was wide voter participation among citizens in an environment marked by calm that had never been seen before. In our opinion, that demonstrates the benefits of the peace process, which benefit not only one sector, but the entirety of Colombian society and the region.

Bolivia would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Iván Duque on his election as President of the Republic of Colombia. We reiterate our sincerest wishes for his success and reaffirm the brotherly bonds that link our countries. We know that the challenges ahead are many, but I believe that I speak for everyone when I say that both the Latin America and Caribbean region and the rest of the international community, as a whole, are committed to working with Colombia, for which consolidating stable and lasting peace is an imperative. Clearly, the present situation presents a very complicated landscape. I will refer to the issues that my country believes to be of concern at this time.

First, concerning the murders of social leaders, former FARC members and human rights defenders, we are deeply concerned about and condemn such acts of violence. Despite efforts made, it is necessary to work even harder to extend the presence of public order beyond territorial reintegration areas, as well as to consolidate a State presence in areas formerly under FARC control. We urgently call for pursuing investigations to find those responsible and for the courts to punish them to the full extent of the law. We would be remiss if we did not mention and commend political leaders' unanimous support for the pact of repudiation of violence against social leaders, as it demonstrates unity in responding to such acts.

Secondly, there is a feeling of uncertainty and fear among former FARC combatants with respect to legal and political guarantees. Although it is a historical fact that eight members of the FARC political party have assumed their respective seats among the ten that were created for them in the Congress, the controversies resulting from the transitional justice system became more acute during the reporting period, partially owing to the detention of Jesús Santrich. Undoubtedly, that fact has created frustration among former FARC members. We therefore believe that is essential to respect the spirit of the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace with regard to the Special Jurisdiction for Peace.

Thirdly, concerning the modest progress made in the area of economic reintegration, we welcome the issuance of a decree enabling access to landownership for former FARC members organized in cooperatives. Although that is an essential step forward, more than a year and a half have passed without that part of the agreement having been realized. It is necessary to ensure timely access to that benefit and move forward in the implementation process of the decree on cooperatives, as only 8 of 70 such projects are reportedly operating, according to the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/723).

Similarly, additional support is needed for productive projects and income-generating opportunities for former FARC combatants — a situation complicated by the fact that thousands of ex-members are scattered throughout the country. The importance of promoting and supporting a gender and ethnic perspective in realizing productive projects deserves to be mentioned. In that regard, the adoption of the strategy for the long-term reintegration of former combatants, covering an eight-year period until 2026, will provide the incoming Government with a plan ensuring a sustainable economic future for ex-combatants.

My delegation hopes for the successful outcome of discussions and negotiations currently under way between the Government of Colombia and the National Liberation Army. We are grateful for the contribution of the Republic of Cuba in this and other peace initiatives in our region.

Lastly, the challenges concerning this issue are many, but we can state that this peace process is the most important in the history of Colombia and requires the continued support of the international community not only to consolidate stable and lasting peace, but above all it must continue with the leadership and the political will that has been shown thus far.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): I want to thank Special Representative Arnault for his briefing and welcome the participation of Vice-President Naranjo Trujillo. With regard to our Colombian friends, I want

to take a moment to reflect on the hard-won opportunity for a lasting peace that they have achieved, which seemed like an impossible dream at times, as President Santos Calderón has said. Through their tireless efforts to address justice and reparations issues in their peace agreement with the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP), Colombia is truly an example to the world. They should be proud of what they have done, and we look forward to what they will continue to achieve.

The Colombian Government is beginning to extend its presence and provide services in areas that have known conflict for decades. The United States applauds the Colombian Government's efforts to build roads, hospitals, police stations and schools in underserved rural and former conflict areas. Providing security, infrastructure and public services is critical to sustaining peace in Colombia. That has never been more important than it is now, especially during this time of transition and in the light of the recent killings of human rights defenders and community leaders. We commend the decision of President Santos Calderón and President-elect Duque, as well as key State institutions and political parties, to sign a national pact against the violence. Protecting the fundamental freedoms of all Colombian citizens, including social leaders, depends on strengthening the rule of law. Particularly important are successful prosecutions of those who seek to silence the voices of human rights advocates and community leaders.

The United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia has been vital to this process, and we encourage Colombia to continue its important partnership with the Mission to support security as well as reintegration efforts for ex-combatants. We trust that the Government will continue the momentum established by the historic Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace and consolidate security gains that will bring about a just and lasting peace for all Colombians. Ensuring meaningful justice and accountability for perpetrators of serious crimes committed during many years of armed conflict is vital to reconciliation, and we believe that the transitional justice processes outlined in the agreement provide the opportunity to deliver justice for victims.

At the same time, the successful implementation of the peace accord is inextricably linked to our joint efforts to dismantle criminal organizations and curtail narcotrafficking. In our own country, President Trump has made substance abuse prevention a priority, and we are devoting resources to reducing the demand for cocaine. In Colombia, the United States continues to work with authorities to cut coca cultivation and cocaine production by half by the end of 2023. Together we need to accelerate our counter-narcotics efforts and deliver sustainable results to the people of both countries through increased resources, the effective use of all available tools and an integrated whole-of-Government approach.

Colombians are not alone in the fight. The United States will continue to support them, including through a unique, comprehensive strategy to reduce coca cultivation, known as Antioquia libre de coca. Through coordinated efforts of the Colombian police and army, local and national Governments and the private sector, the plan is already delivering infrastructure and providing licit economic opportunities for local communities, while pushing coca growers to transition to licit crops. Importantly, owing in part to those efforts, the United States Government's 2017 coca cultivation estimates showed a 20 per cent decrease in the region being addressed for the first time in five years, thereby bucking a national trend. Colombia continues to establish the conditions for extended peace, and while challenges remain, the Government has shown its strength as a regional leader, especially by providing shelter and services to nearly 1 million Venezuelans fleeing crisis in their own country.

We are proud to have worked to support Colombia's response to the crisis, and we remain committed to continuing our engagement with Colombia to provide additional humanitarian support as needed. The people of Colombia know better than most that peace is precious but fragile. We stand with them in working to preserve that peace and build a strong and prosperous future for generations to come.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I would like to begin by thanking Special Representative Jean Arnault for his insightful and comprehensive briefing and for the important work that the United Nations Verification Mission is doing in support of the Peace Agreement in Colombia. He may be assured of our continued full support for his efforts. I would also like to welcome Vice-President Naranjo to the Security Council. We are grateful for his personal efforts and those of his Government to establish peace in Colombia. The Kingdom of the Netherlands is fully

committed to supporting peace in Colombia, which is also the message that my Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Stephanus Blok, conveyed during his recent visit to the country. We follow developments in Colombia with particular interest. Our Kingdom is made up of four countries, of which Aruba and Curaçao are close maritime neighbours of Colombia.

The recently held presidential elections mark an important and commendable milestone in Colombia. The elections were fair, inclusive and peaceful, and saw the highest turnout in the country's recent history. We congratulate President-elect Iván Duque on winning the election and welcome his expressed commitment to seeking unity. The Prime Minister of Curaçao, Mr. Eugene Rhuggenaath, looks forward to attending the upcoming inauguration on behalf of our Kingdom. We also look forward to working closely with the new Government, based on the close friendship and interconnectedness between our two peoples.

The change of Governments in Colombia provides us with an occasion to take stock of what has been achieved so far and the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. The Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace, which ended the 50-year conflict, is historic by any standard. We pay tribute to the Administration of President Santos Calderón and the Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (FARC) for their courage and leadership in advancing the peace process. We hope that Colombia will now seize the opportunity to further consolidate peace. In that context, I would like to touch on three points — our concern about the security situation, the need for the inclusive reintegration of former FARC members and the importance of transitional justice.

With respect to my first point, the security situation, we are deeply concerned about the high levels of insecurity in the zones most affected by the armed conflict. In these areas, social leaders, human rights defenders and journalists are increasingly being threatened and sometimes even killed. This often happens in areas where armed groups proliferate and continue to resist peacebuilding efforts. The Colombian people, State institutions and political parties alike have recently expressed themselves on this point in a so-called pact of repudiation of violence against social leaders, to which Mr. Arnault referred. The pact sends a strong signal that Colombians are not willing to accept the possibility that those who speak out are too often made to pay the highest price.

We are also concerned about the continued violence against former FARC combatants. Their security guarantees are central to the Peace Agreement and form the bedrock of a durable peace. The Government has taken initiatives to address the violence, strengthening mechanisms to prevent, protect and hold the perpetrators to account. But in order to make these mechanisms work, a thorough analysis of the patterns behind the violence, including identifying the intellectual authors, would be useful. We look forward to a comprehensive stabilization approach that effectively asserts the presence of the State in the most vulnerable regions and communities. It should include institutions for security, infrastructure, education, health care and the rule of law.

That brings me to my second point, concerning the inclusive reintegration of former combatants, which remains a core component of the Peace Agreement. The stimulation of income-generating activities and the provision of social services are important tools for addressing the root causes of the conflict and ultimately promoting self-reliance. We encourage the Government, the former FARC combatants, the private sector and the local authorities to jointly design a comprehensive strategy aimed at fully reintegrating the former combatants into society, as foreseen in the Peace Agreement. It is essential that women and youth have a voice in this process.

My third point concerns transitional justice, which is an essential aspect of conflict resolution. Accountability and reconciliation are two sides of the same coin on the road to sustainable peace. This is why my Government is actively supporting the transitional-justice institutions, as well as victims' organizations in Colombia, with a contribution of €2.5 million. We underscore the need for the swift, effective and properly resourced implementation of the different transitional-justice institutions. In this regard, we express our full support for the workings of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, and welcome the fact that public hearings have started. In this way, transitional justice offers the opportunity to address past grievances, putting the 8 million victims of the armed conflict at the centre of our peacebuilding efforts. We hope this will turn the page in Colombia.

I will conclude in Spanish.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

The peace dividends I have just mentioned, especially security, inclusive reintegration and

transitional justice, are intimately connected. A sustained commitment to implementing the agreements in a comprehensive manner can ensure that peace in Colombia is stable and lasting. We call on all stakeholders to work together to this end and to continue to build on the great achievements that have been made. The international community is with Colombia, and Colombia can count on the continued support of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would first like to welcome Vice-President Óscar Naranjo of Colombia to the Chamber today and to thank Special Representative Jean Arnault for his informative briefing.

The Security Council has met today to discuss the situation in Colombia a year after the adoption of resolution 2366 (2017) (see S/PV.7997), which heralded the completion of the process of the laying down of arms by former combatants and the country's embarking on a new, peaceful phase. The United Nations Verification Mission established by the resolution was mandated to monitor the Colombian Government's fulfilment of its part of the commitments under the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace, which brought to an end hostilities that had lasted for decades.

We have seen a number of positive changes in the country this year. The former guerrilla movement has been transformed into a political party, parliamentary and presidential elections have been held with record turnouts and the Special Jurisdiction for Peace mechanism has been launched. Despite the problems of which we are all aware, these are all unquestionable signs of an improvement in the situation. It will be important to ensure that this progress continues, with the support of society. We sincerely wish Colombia's newly elected President Iván Duque and his Government every success on this path.

Mr. Arnault's briefing confirmed Colombians' resolve to work to advance the peace process, although there is still a great deal to be done. Long-standing disagreements are still hampering the consolidation of sustainable peace, which is why we wholeheartedly support the assistance provided to the Colombians by the United Nations presence under Mr. Arnault's leadership. We are grateful to the Verification Mission for monitoring the situation in the country. We are seriously concerned about the disturbing reports of the ongoing murders of former combatants and community leaders, seizures of liberated lands and problems with the political and socioeconomic reintegration of former combatants and the transitional justice system. All of these require urgent solutions for which a responsible approach on the part of the country's leadership is clearly essential, along with support from all sectors of society and an overall commitment to the peace that was so hard-won. The continued attention of the international community — which sees Colombia as a good example of post-conflict recovery — is also important, not to mention a particular focus on developments with regard to the National Liberation Army.

We will continue to emphasize that the Colombians' demonstration of responsibility as a nation and their desire to seek politically sustainable solutions made possible the signing of the 2016 Peace Agreement, which enabled the Security Council and the Secretary-General to support the peace process and must therefore be upheld exactly as it is by all parties. For our part, we once again affirm our willingness to continue to support the people and the Government of Colombia in their work of building a lasting peace and post-conflict development.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): We thank Special Representative Arnault for his briefing on the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia (S/2018/723). We are pleased that the Vice-President of Colombia, His Excellency Mr. Óscar Naranjo, is here with us today.

The first and second rounds of the presidential elections, held on 27 May and 17 June, as well as the congressional election held in March, sent a positive message for all who closely follow the implementation of Colombia's Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace, not only because they were conducted in an entirely peaceful and inclusive manner but because they have symbolic significance in opening a new chapter in the country's political history following the end of five decades of conflict. We congratulate both the Government of Colombia and the Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (FARC) for their commitment and such major achievements. We also congratulate the outgoing President, Mr. Juan Manuel Santos Calderón, on the courage and commitment he has shown in steering the peace process.

While Colombians have continued to show patience and perseverance in the face of the challenges presented by the implementation process, they still face serious problems in making the terms of the Peace Agreement a reality, and the Council should continue to provide all of the necessary support to the Colombian parties in their efforts to handle those challenges and speedily implement the full Agreement.

As the Secretary-General's report noted, we are very much encouraged by the intention expressed by President-elect Iván Duque to turn the page on polarization and build a consensus on the envisaged goals of the Peace Agreement. While we are encouraged by his intention to keep the fundamental parts of the Agreement, we would also like to underscore the fact that great caution will be needed when making any improvements to it in order to avoid unintended consequences that could affect the implementation process. We recognize the Constitutional Court's major achievements in reviewing peace-related legislation, including the legislative acts that created congressional seats for the FARC, a land fund and other measures for improving access to land and modifying the National Protection Unit to include former combatants in the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) as close protection officers. Such measures can strengthen hope and faith in implementing the Peace Agreement.

We are also conscious of the sensitive issues that still require careful handling. The increasing violence in the conflict zones, the delays in the socioeconomic reintegration of FARC-EP combatants into civilian life, the issue of access to land ownership, the absence or inadequate presence of State institutions in places left by FARC-EP combatants, the continued killings of community leaders, former FARC members and their relatives, as well as other issues highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General, could potentially complicate the tasks ahead in consolidating peace in the country. In that regard, the national pact against violence and killings signed by the outgoing and incoming Presidents, key State institutions and political parties will be instrumental in dealing with the increasing patterns of violence, especially in the rural parts of Colombia.

With regard to the negotiation between the Colombian Government and the National Liberation Army, we are encouraged by the report that the two parties have continued their sixth round of negotiations in order to achieve an improved ceasefire agreement. We urge the parties to engage constructively in good-faith discussions towards reaching a new ceasefire agreement, as well as a permanent peace agreement.

We commend Special Representative Arnault and the United Nations personnel in Colombia for all their efforts in support of the Peace Agreement. We also reiterate our appreciation to the countries of the region and other international partners that continue to closely support and accompany the implementation of the Peace Agreement. Lastly, we take this opportunity to reaffirm our continued support to the full implementation of the Colombian Peace Agreement and to stand in solidarity with the people and the Government of Colombia as they open a new chapter and march towards sustainable peace.

Mr. Radomski (Poland): I would like to welcome His Excellency Mr. Óscar Naranjo, Vice-President of the Republic of Colombia, to today's Council meeting. Let me also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Jean Arnault, for a very informative briefing.

The presidential and legislative elections that took place in May this year were Colombia's most peaceful and inclusive in more than 50 years. We congratulate President-elect Mr. Iván Duque and hope for productive, sincere and open cooperation between the new Administration and the Council.

As the peace process remains an undeniable success of Colombian society, we would also like to acknowledge the unquestionable role of President Santos Calderón and the leaders of the Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (FARC), who made it possible and turned an agreement from a piece of paper into reality on the ground. It serves as a source of inspiration worldwide and sends a message that peace is possible, even if it seemed unimaginable just a few years ago. Intense political will is still required on both sides to drive the peace process forward. We strongly believe that the parties will remain united. We hope that despite the difficulties in the implementation of the peace process, the general timetable for its completion will be maintained. We take note of the recently launched sixth cycle of talks with the National Liberation Army in Havana and hope that it will bring tangible results.

The acceptance by Congress of the rules of procedure of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace and its

first public hearings, along with the inauguration of the new Congress with 10 representatives from the FARC political party, sends a positive message.

The question of security remains an issue. We are concerned about the continued insecurity in some of the conflict-affected areas, including the increase in the killings of human rights defenders and social and community leaders. It fuels social mistrust of the Government's willingness to fulfil its commitments. The Government's Plan Horus, which has been implemented in the most vulnerable municipalities, has yet to produce the desired effect. Suffice it to say that an additional 22 FARC members were killed during the reporting period. Also, despite considerable efforts on the part of the Government, coca cultivation is growing. There is a close connection between drug trafficking and the widespread insecurity in some regions near the strategic drug-trafficking routes. We strongly believe that the national pact rejecting violence signed on 9 July by outgoing President Santos and President-elect Duque, as well as key State institutions and political parties, is a major step towards ensuring that social leaders will not fear for their lives.

The full political, legal and socioeconomic reintegration of the former members of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) is essential. We strongly believe that the adoption of the landmark decree enabling access to land ownership for former combatants will offer the strongest possible incentive for the majority of former FARC-EP members, greatly assisting them in the uneasy process of reintegration. We hope that it will be implemented as quickly as possible now that the election period has ended. The efforts that the National Reintegration Council has made to ensure a more gender-sensitive approach to economic reintegration are visible and have been well received. Once again we underline that a durable peace can be achieved only when women and men are equally involved in the peace process.

In conclusion, Poland fully supports the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, which continues to play a vital role in facilitating the implementation of the Peace Agreement. We also commend the role of the country team and every United Nations agency present on the ground. While the peace process is making significant progress, further strong involvement on the part of the United Nations in Colombia remains crucially important.

Mr. Michon (France) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to welcome His Excellency Mr. Óscar Naranjo Trujillo, Vice-President of Colombia, and pay tribute to him for his personal commitment to peace and the role he played in the negotiation and implementation of the Peace Agreement with the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP).

(*spoke in French*)

I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Jean Arnault, both for the quality of his briefing and for his exemplary work as Head of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia.

The Colombian authorities, particularly President Santos Calderón, have shown exceptional political courage that has been a source of admiration and inspiration for the entire international community. Despite doubts and criticism, they initiated a historic peace process with the FARC-EP and have redoubled their efforts to implement it. Mr Jean-Yves Le Drian, our Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, is currently visiting Colombia and will take the opportunity to reaffirm France's unwavering support for this process and our readiness to continue to support the Colombian people on the road to peace. That is the message that he will convey to the President-elect, Mr. Iván Duque, whom he will have the honour of meeting during his visit.

The United Nations in general, and the Security Council in particular, have also played a key role in implementing the Peace Agreement by providing the necessary support for disarmament and the political transition of the FARC-EP. With regard to the mandate conferred on the second United Nations Mission in Colombia, I would like to focus on three points today.

First, France reiterates its congratulations to the Colombian authorities on their organization and successful holding of presidential elections on 27 May and 17 June. That democratic exercise, which followed the parliamentary elections held in March, confirmed the evolution of Colombian political life towards a more peaceful climate and Colombian citizens' broader participation in the democratic process. In that regard, we encourage the elected authorities to pursue the implementation of every aspect of the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace concluded with the FARC-EP. Particular

attention should be paid to the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, which is the cornerstone of the comprehensive truth, justice, reparation and non-repetition system, as well as to amnesty for detainees and the search for the tens of thousands of persons assumed to be missing. Those commitments by the Colombian State are commitments to peace undertaken before the international community and it is important that they be fully honoured.

My second point concerns the security of the women and men working for peace in the areas affected by the conflict. France firmly condemns the killings of civil-society leaders, human rights defenders and those involved in coca substitution programmes. Despite the Colombian authorities' commitment to reducing the level of violence, the situation remains extremely worrying. In a context where illegal armed groups are struggling to regain control of areas previously controlled by the FARC-EP, it is taking a long time for peace dividends to reach the local populations. We therefore encourage continued efforts, including the deployment of State services, both security forces and civilian institutions, in those areas. Furthermore, combating impunity for crimes committed in the context of the conflict, including extrajudicial executions, is crucial and must continue.

Finally, I would like to draw the Council's attention once again to another key point for reintegration and the future of the peace process, which is access to land and sources of income. Indeed, once the issue of access to land is resolved and the restitution of the lands looted during the conflict is the subject of legal proceedings, it is socioeconomic projects that will give former combatants prospects for a future within the Colombian national community. That socioeconomic reintegration, which is closely linked to the provision of State services in the most vulnerable areas, is the key to the lasting success of the peace process. It is receiving major support from the international community, including France and the European Union, through various financial instruments. The restoration of territories that have been ruined by half a century of conflict depends on it.

Regardless of their political affiliation, all Colombians can be proud of the Peace Agreement reached with the FARC-EP. More than ever, consolidating that peace requires the unity of the Colombian nation as it enters a new era, one in which former combatants will take their full place in Colombian society and other groups, we hope, will choose to turn away from violence, as we expect the National Liberation Army to do. France therefore encourages the new Colombian authorities to continue implementing the agreement and confirm the remarkable success of the peace process in Colombia.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): At the outset, I would like to welcome His Excellency the Vice President of Colombia, Mr. Óscar Naranjo Trujillo, to the Security Council. I would also like to thank Special Representative Arnault for his briefing and the active role of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia.

Kazakhstan welcomes all the positive developments in Colombia and commends the significant efforts that have been made to ensure the irreversibility of the peace process. In view of the recent presidential and congressional elections, the first held in Colombia since its achievement of a historic peace deal in 2016, we hope its new Administration will respect and guarantee the full implementation of the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace, treasuring and building on the gains achieved to the benefit of all Colombians. And with the swearing in of the new Congress on 20 July, we hope to see faster implementation of the peace-related legislation, especially as it pertains to important rural and political reforms.

It is gratifying to know that Colombia is the first country to have created a transitional justice system. We are confident that the Colombian legislative body and political forces will remain dedicated to justice. It is also essential that they commit to peace and ensure the smooth functioning of the comprehensive system for truth, justice, reparation and non-repetition proposed in the peace accord. Kazakhstan welcomes the holding of the first public hearings within the Special Jurisdiction for Peace and looks forward to the effective operation of the other justice-system institutions, the Truth Commission and the Special Unit for the Search for Persons Deemed as Missing.

At the same time, we are deeply concerned about the ongoing deadly violence against social leaders, community activists and human rights defenders. Kazakhstan welcomes the eight new measures announced by President Juan Manuel Santos Calderón, to be taken in addition to the previous launch of a rapid response system and the reorganization of the

army. We hope that those measures, along with the recently adopted pact of repudiation of violence against social leaders, will guarantee the collective security of all the threatened groups and curb their killings. Kazakhstan is also dismayed by the current vulnerable security state of former combatants of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo and their family members, which could very likely jeopardize their reincorporation into society. We believe, however, that the Colombian Government and all the parties concerned will make every effort to avoid an escalation of violence and do their best to guarantee the peace process's smooth continuation and success.

We welcome the continuation of the peace talks between the Colombian Government and the last remaining guerrilla group, the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN). However, Kazakhstan notes with regret that the hostile activity of militia groups in the Colombian-Ecuadorian border region has resulted in the killing of innocent people. We hope that during the sixth cycle of inclusive consultations, which started on 2 July, the Colombian Government and the ELN will be able to achieve a new bilateral ceasefire. We also urge Colombia's incoming administration to continue negotiations to that end.

Lastly, Kazakhstan reiterates its firm commitment to the Colombian peace process and calls upon all interested parties to do their best to foster reconciliation.

Mrs. Mele Colifa (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of my delegation, I would like to express our appreciation for the briefing just delivered by Mr. Jean Arnault, which not only provides a clear, detailed and concise picture of the current situation in Colombia, but also shows the ongoing effort that the United Nations team is making to support the peace process in the country. We also welcome the presence of His Excellency Oscar Adolfo Naranjo Trujillo, Vice-President of Colombia.

The successful conclusion of the recent presidential elections held at the end of May and beginning of June is a another step forward in the political process in Colombia, which has been under way since the triumphant legislative elections of 11 March. It demonstrates the goodwill of the Colombian people and the progress made, with the support of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, and thus demonstrates the positive changes in its national policy.

However, we note with great concern the confrontations that continue to take place in the country despite the signed pact, which is recognized by all parties, institutions, political parties and the President. We are concerned that all the progress achieved is being reversed. We therefore urge all parties to the Colombian political process, despite the change of Government, to work together to ensure the implementation of the Peace Agreement, which enjoys the unanimous support of the members of the Security Council and concerning which the representatives of the country's main political parties stressed the need to ensure irreversibility.

To guarantee the development of the Colombian political process, the new Government must facilitate the improvement of the gains already made with regard to the reintegration and security of the former combatants of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP). It must allow that process to continue, establishing strategies and taking necessary measures to reintegrate the members of that group into society and to provide the necessary protection and security in the areas formerly occupied by FARC, protecting also thousands of children and women who were displaced by the fighting and guaranteeing their rights as members of civil society.

The Colombian Government is called upon to take action in the interest and to the benefit of the people of Colombia, who for so long have been victims of the many differences that sadly persist to this day, though on a smaller scale. We encourage the Government to continue engaging in the negotiations being carried out in Cuba with the Ejército de Liberación Nacional.

We note that in the case of any problem, the root causes of the conflict must be tackled first, because therein lies the foundation for the lasting peace that is sought in this case. In that regard, we would like to recall the words of the President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, His Excellency Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, during the sixth national dialogue round table, held from 16 to 23 of this month, between the Government and the political parties of our country, when he said,

> "The chief guarantor of national unity, the balance of State institutions by virtue of the attributes conferred to them by law, is the Government, which must ensure that the needs of the people are met in order to defuse possible divisions and overcome the challenges the country faces."

Finally, my delegation would like to express its appreciation for all the hard work that the Security Council is doing in Colombia under the protection of the resolutions adopted in this Chamber and with respect for the Charter of the United Nations to put an end to the situation that has affected the Colombian people for several decades.

Mr. Almunayekh (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to welcome again to the Security Council Mr. Óscar Naranjo Trujillo, Vice-President of Colombia. I also thank Mr. Jean Arnault, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, for his valuable briefing and his comprehensive presentation on the most important achievements in Columbia, as well as the challenges that are still facing the peace operation there.

We reaffirm our full support for the peace process in Colombia during the upcoming round of negotiations between the Colombian Government and the National Liberation Army. We hope that the negotiations will be successful in ensuring that the aspirations of the Colombian people — establishing a secure and safe environment characterized by tolerance and integration, while leading to progress and economic development in Colombia — are met.

We commend the holding recently of successful presidential elections and the high voter turnout by Colombians in a safe environment that demonstrated the sincere resolve of all Colombian parties to achieve stability and lasting peace in their country. In that regard, we congratulate the new President-elect, Mr. Iván Duque, and express our hope that the new Colombian Government will continue to work pursuant to the Peace Agreement and implement all its items to ensure the desired stability and peace.

We commend the efforts of President Santos and the leaders of the Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (FARC). The opening session of the Parliament included FARC representatives, and that is the best demonstration of the progress achieved. We also commend the efforts of the current Colombian Government to improve the security situation and to advance in the areas of legislation, transitional justice and the reintegration of former FARC combatants.

In that regard, we underscore the importance of continuing to provide security, legal, social and economic guarantees in order to reintegrate former FARC members. There is also a need to protect the leaders of local communities and human rights defenders, in addition to religious leaders. We call for promoting attention to women and young people so as to guarantee their participation in the various initiatives linked to national reforms and policies. They must be an integral part of the solution and custodians of the future. Furthermore, we look forward to the holding of a referendum on 26 August by the Colombian Government on the management of public resources in the context of combating corruption with full transparency.

The State of Kuwait commends the ongoing efforts of the United Nations Verification Mission, led by Mr. Arnault, in coordination with national, regional and local authorities, along with the civil society and the private sector. Its role is to support national initiatives and achieve stability and peace in Colombia. We reaffirm our commitment to the Government of Colombia and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in their efforts in achieving what the Colombian people want — peace, security and prosperity for their country.

The President: I will now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Sweden.

I want to first thank Mr. Jean Arnault for his excellent work and his briefing today. I want to reiterate Sweden's full support of his efforts and those of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia.

I also welcome Vice-President Naranjo to the Chamber today. We thank him for his very important personal contribution to peace in Colombia. Through him I also want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to President Juan Manuel Santos for his leadership, as well as that of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) for their determination to turn a new page and to deliver peace for the benefit of all Colombians. Indeed, FARC's transition from guerilla movement to political party is historic and irreversible. We also congratulate the people of Colombia on the recent elections and incoming President Duque, as he assumes his office soon. The Colombian Peace Agreement demonstrates that conflicts can be solved with dialogue rather than guns. It is an inspirational example.

Ensuring that the full benefits of the peace process are secured will require continued investment in its implementation. We welcome that the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, a key component of the Peace

Agreement, has started its crucial work. It was designed and agreed with the objective of guaranteeing truth, justice, reparation and non-repetition, and the fulfilment of this commitment should help heal the divisions created by decades of conflict.

The continuing violence against, and the increasing number of killings of, human rights defenders, community leaders, FARC members and their families, as outlined in the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/723), is of grave concern. It underscores the need for the State to fill the power vacuum, to do its utmost to ensure respect for human rights and accountability for violations and abuses thereof, and to safeguard that the rule of law benefits all Colombians in all of Colombia.

In that connection, we welcome the national pact signed by both President Santos and President-elect Duque and by key State institutions and political parties. We encourage the Government of Colombia to pair its efforts to provide security in conflict-affected areas with a stronger presence of civilian authorities and agencies providing basic services to communities.

The Peace Agreement has provided a historic opportunity to bring socioeconomic development and the rule of law to all parts of the country. To seize that opportunity, a redoubled and sustained effort is now needed from all parts of the State in support of the wider Peace Agreement, including comprehensive rural reform, so that it can rapidly deliver tangible peace dividends for all Colombians.

The full political, legal and socioeconomic reintegration of former Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo members is of the utmost importance. That includes progress on the setting up of productive projects and the key issue of access to land for reintegration.

We would like to highlight the important recommendation in the report on the importance of combating the drug trade as an integral part of the effort to advance peace, development and the rule of law in former conflict areas. We also want to stress the importance of encouraging the voluntary illicit-crop substitution programme, which can provide people with a lawful and predictable income opportunity.

The Peace Agreement in Colombia is a model for inclusion. To succeed in consolidating the peace, the implementation of the peace process must continue to be inclusive. In that regard, I want to highlight the important work the Mission has undertaken on gender mainstreaming, as well as its engagement with women's groups and youth groups in Colombia.

Finally, we welcome the ongoing talks between the Government and the Ejército Nacional de Liberación and reiterate that the United Nations and the Security Council should stand ready to assist the parties in a meaningful way. As a member of the Grupo de Países de Apoyo, we will assist the process as much as we can.

Over the last two years, the Council has travelled the path of peace with the Government and the people of Colombia. We look forward to continuing our constructive engagement with the incoming Government, given the Council's commitment to support implementation of the peace agreement.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the Vice-President of Colombia.

Mr. Naranjo Trujillo (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Twenty months after signing the Agreement that put an end to the conflict with the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) and 12 days from the end of the term of the President of the Republic, Juan Manuel Santos, I bring to the Security Council, to the United Nations and to the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia an expression of gratitude from my Government and 50 million Colombians. We are grateful for what has been indisputable support for peacebuilding in my country.

On this opportunity, as it is our final intervention, having received the third consecutive report of the Mission, I wish to issue a call in the Council to the entire world and to our compatriots for the protection and safeguarding of peace — the supreme, superlative good of a society.

Safeguarding peace in Colombia means, in principle, recognizing that the leadership efforts of President Juan Manual Santos to reach it were not based on any political calculation, but rather on the ethical conviction that it was urgent to put an end to 53 years of violence that, regrettably, cut short the lives of 220,000 Colombians. Putting an end to the conflict with that conviction meant acknowledging that five decades of internal clashes resulted in more than 8,400,000 victims in our country.

Safeguarding peace means honouring our commitments under the Agreement, with the understanding that the promise is not that of one Administration, but rather that of the State in its entirety and of society in general.

Safeguarding and protecting peace means not ignoring the great achivements — which representatives have mentioned here — that have been made in record time. After 53 years of armed conflict, there was a surrender of arms in nine months — in record time, before the year and a half timeline. FARC, an organization that had taken up arms and defied the Colombian State and society, transformed into a political party, in record time. That political party now has a seat in Colombia's Congress, as we saw on 20 July.

Safeguarding peace means that the reintegration of 13,000 ex-combatants of FARC represents opportunities for rights, services and personal safety. As has been mentioned here, it provides political security, but also the security of being linked socioeconomically to a legal system.

Mr. Jean Arnault, Head of the Mission, has said clearly that reintegration is critical. On that issue, I wish to assure the Council that today, more than 12,000 ex-combatants are receiving a basic monthly stipend equivalent to 90 per cent of minimum wage in my country. I want to assure the Council that 9,000 are linked to our security and pension systems. I assure the Council that we are making progress, certainly not as quickly as we would like, so as to make productive projects a reality, but I do want to share a piece of good news that has also been mentioned during the meeting. The Government of President Santos is bequeathing the next Government a mid-to-long-term public policy document. That means that there is a clear road map that will make reintegration sustainable.

Safeguarding and protecting peace means increasing efforts in order to continue to reduce violence.

We will never tire of saying that in 2017, as a result of the Agreement, Colombia saw the lowest murder rate in the last 42 years. Sadly, we are facing a major contradiction in this regard. Although the murder rate is decreasing, the number of threats and attacks against social leaders and human rights defenders has risen.

I would like to underscore, as the members of the Council have done, the remarkable fact that under the leadership of President Santos, the whole nation has been brought together under a comprehensive political pact, with no distinctions from the local to the central level. We hope that this political pact against violence will be a very powerful tool, conveying the imperative need to renounce the old culture of conflict in which death seemed to be part of the solution. Now we are trying to ensure that life is protected as a supreme, exceptional and sacred social good. The logic of death for life is the real challenge that we are facing in the wake of 50 years of war.

Safeguarding peace means recognizing and strengthening the legitimacy of our Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition. We wish to say today, without any excessive optimism, that we feel great satisfaction at the fact that the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, through its hearings, has prioritized dealing with three tragedies of war: the tragedy of the abductions that took place during the 53 years of conflict; the tragedy of the recruitment of minors — children, girls, boys and teenagers — in that war; and what is known in my country as false-positive cases: the deaths of innocent citizens within the context of the conflict.

These hearings are part and parcel of a functioning transitional justice system whose goal is to bring to justice and punish those who were in any way involved in that internal armed conflict and who broke laws and violated human rights. It gives us assurance that we are moving forward, as we have said so often in the past, in a manner that strikes a balance between peace and justice, as is necessary in order to move towards reconciliation.

Safeguarding peace means continuing to ensure that our institutions, whose approach is based on more than just counter-insurgency, are effective throughout our territory — a territory that is now perceived not as a theatre for military operations but as a land where conditions are being created for the transformation of communities. We are well aware of the fact that we must continue to progress in our understanding in order to change that logic and reach all of those territories, no longer as police or the military, but as a unified State that protects its communities. Safeguarding and protecting peace means recognizing the invaluable support of the international community, for which we should like once again to express our gratitude.

If there is one unifying factor around peace in Colombia, it is the unfailing support of the Council. We

say to our compatriots and to the entire world that we have no words to express our gratitude for the unanimous way in which the Council has supported peacebuilding efforts in our country. Thanks to the work of the Council and to observations and recommendations of the Mission, we understand that challenges remain.

We know that as we travel the road ahead, we will have to give priority to, first, safeguarding life in those areas where leaders have begun to speak out in favour of democratic participation in the country. Secondly, we must also need to move forward in overcoming Colombia's historical tragedy: drug trafficking. In that regard, we would stress that given the end of armed conflict with FARC, for the first time in the 35 years of that tragedy we have now a unique opportunity. Instead of a strategy to combat illegal crop cultivation and the production of drugs, we can set up, as we are doing, a crop-substitution programme so that the 124,000 families that have expressed their desire to abandon this illicit activity can earn their living legally.

We must also strengthen our efforts to combat organized crime, because we are not naïve. Colombia is now facing pressure from international cross-border drug-trafficking organizations that wish to continue with their illegal trade. The Council can be sure that the Government of President Santos will, until the very last minute of its mandate, be strengthening the country's capacity to contain this threat.

Safeguarding peace must also mean — and we say this without any pretension — that the lessons learnt from the Colombian process of seeking an end to the conflict can serve as a lesson to other nations so that they, too, can overcome violence and differences and so that conflicts become a thing of the past. Perhaps we are a little sentimental in a world that is suffering from so many conflicts, but we feel that perhaps the case of Colombia is a paradigmatic one.

We are aware that genuine, innovative efforts were made here that were based on ethical standards, political pragmatism and international support, and we therefore, at the end of our term, express our gratitude in that respect. The Council can rest assured: the incoming Government of President-elect Iván Duque has said that it will continue to give priority to the agreements reached and ensure that Colombia continues down a path towards sustainable peacebuilding.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Before we adjourn this meeting, I should just like to say — and I am sure that I am speaking on behalf of all the members of the Council — that we thank the Vice-President for his pivotal, key, decisive and personal role in all the progress made in the peace process in Colombia. We thank him very much.

(*spoke in English*)

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion of the subject.

The meeting rose at 4.50 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8320

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8320th meeting
Friday, 27 July 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Skoog	(Sweden)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Yao Shaojun
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Tenya
	Poland	Mr. Radomski
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018) (S/2018/724)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

18-24158 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018) (S/2018/724)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/724, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018).

On 9 July, we met in this Chamber for an open debate on children in armed conflict (see S/PV.8305). The consensus among the representatives of Member States who spoke that day was clear — children in war must be protected. That sentiment was mirrored in the unprecedented support of States Members for resolution 2427 (2018). The time has come for the Security Council to move from words to action. That is why we suggested that today's meeting on the humanitarian situation in Syria focus on the effects of the humanitarian crisis on children.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lowcock.

Mr. Lowcock: I am pleased to be here together with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict today. The appalling suffering that this war has wrought on Syria's children is truly unimaginable. Yet it is Syria's children who are the future of the country. Ensuring that their rights are respected, protected and fulfilled must be at the centre of all of our efforts.

The Secretary-General's Envoy briefed the Security Council comprehensively in closed consultations on Wednesday on the hostilities in south-west Syria. I agree with everything that he said and I do not believe that I need to repeat it. What I would like to say is that the United Nations and its partners have mobilized a response, which is reaching tens of thousands of people across much of the south-west. That has built on sustained efforts to preposition supplies through cross-border deliveries and now draws on programming from inside Syria, implemented through the Syrian Arab Red Crescent in agreement with the Government. That has included the delivery of food from the World Food Programme for approximately 200,000 people across Dar'a governorate in recent weeks. United Nations personnel went to Al-Sahwa and Kahil in Dar'a governorate to assess needs and deliver food on 12 July.

On 15 July, United Nations personnel participated in a high-level mission to Nasib and Um Al-Mayazen in Dar'a, as well. However, an estimated 110,000 newly displaced people remain in Quneitra governorate in areas that have largely been cut off from sustained humanitarian assistance. Prepositioned supplies of shelter materials and basic household items for those people have now run out. That leaves displaced people exposed to soaring temperatures and desert winds. Access to water and sanitation is also of increasing concern, with deaths resulting from dehydration and contaminated water already reported. The response therefore now needs to be urgently scaled up across the south-west, and in Quneitra in particular.

Since November 2017, the total number of people in need of assistance in Aleppo and Idlib governorates has increased by close to 600,000 to a total of 4.2 million people. Of those people, half are in acute need owing to new displacement, exposure to ongoing conflict, reduced access to food or water and other factors. The recent arrival of thousands of evacuees from the south-west follows a pattern seen elsewhere earlier this year, which resulted in nearly 120,000 people being displaced into the north-west from March to May. With violence continuing and the risk of a further escalation looming, prepositioning of aid, together with efforts to scale up our ongoing response to immediate needs, is increasingly critical.

I have briefed the Council many times on the appalling suffering of the people of Fo'ah and Kefraya, who have been besieged by armed groups for years. On 16 July, an agreement was reportedly reached to evacuate the towns with approximately 120 buses transporting people to the Mahalej shelter in Aleppo. The United Nations was not party to the agreement, and we have not had access to the evacuees. However, efforts continue to provide the necessary emergency support, in coordination with Syrian Arab Red Crescent and other local organizations.

The United Nations and its partners continue to respond to the needs of people displaced from Afrin district in Tell Rifaat subdistrict, Nubul and Zahra towns, and in surrounding communities. Protection remains a key concern across the area, including in relation to freedom of movement for those wishing to return to their homes and relatedly ensuring that housing, land and property rights are fully respected. We also note worrying reports of insecurity in Afrin town itself, including two vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices being detonated late last month and killing 15 civilians and wounding 23.

Humanitarian needs remain high in eastern Ghouta, although there are also reports of markets beginning to function again and some other normalizing activities. Close to 10,000 people from eastern Ghouta — mostly men between the ages of 15 and 65 — are reported to remain in displacement sites across rural Damascus. In the north-east, returns to Raqqa city have continued, despite risks related to high levels of explosive hazard contamination. There are also very serious concerns about civilians trapped in areas held by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham in the eastern part of Deir ez-Zor governorate, reports of civilian casualties in air strikes in Al-Sousa and Baghour Fukhani earlier this month, and hundreds of cases of diarrhoeal disease, including at least 12 deaths resulting from the consumption of contaminated water. Humanitarian demining in Raqqa city and Deir ez-Zor remains a key priority, together with ongoing efforts to scale up broader humanitarian assistance. The humanitarian situation at Rukban, on the Jordan-Syria border, remains dire, with reports of diarrhoea and dehydration in the camp. Discussions on the deployment of an aid convoy to the area continue.

Humanitarian organizations continue to reach millions of people throughout Syria. More than 3 million people received food this past month, but in many areas, needs have continued to increase, in particular in the south-west and north-west, as well as in Raqqa. Our efforts to keep pace with the rapidly evolving situation depend on support from many Member States. That includes financial contributions to the projects in the Syria humanitarian assistance response plan, aid provided by neighbouring Governments and in-kind donations such as those provided by France, which were facilitated by the Russian Federation earlier this week and distributed in Douma yesterday.

Unfortunately, the United Nations appeal for Syria this year remains substantially underfunded. Sustaining and increasing the confidence of donors depends on the ability of the United Nations and the humanitarian organizations, with which we work, first, to independently assess needs; secondly, to prioritize responses; and, thirdly, to provide assurance and evidence that help is reaching those in greatest need. That in turn requires safe, unimpeded and sustained access in line with the obligations of the parties to the conflict under international humanitarian law. The United Nations remains fully committed to working with the Syrian authorities and other stakeholders in that regard to demonstrate the principled nature of our collective effort and to ensure that we reach as many of the most vulnerable people as possible throughout the country.

The President: I thank Mr. Lowcock for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Gamba.

Ms. Gamba: First, I would like to thank the current President of the Security Council, Sweden, for giving me the opportunity to brief the Council today and share the most recent updates on the situation of children affected by the armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. I concur with the statement delivered just now by my colleague from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Mark Lowcock.

The monitoring and reporting mechanism, created through resolution 1612 (2005) in 2005, collects information on the six grave violations against children in armed conflict situations. The Reporting Mechanism in Syria was established in 2013 following the listing of the Syrian Government for the killing and maiming of children and attacks on schools and hospitals. Every year since then, there has been a tremendous increase in all grave violations committed by all parties to the conflict.

This specific Mechanism is unique in its set up, as it operates as a regional mechanism, gathering information from inside of Syria as well as from neighbouring countries, allowing for a broader scope in monitoring and capturing violations committed across Syria, while large parts of the country is inaccessible to the United Nations. However, I must stress that, although the cases documented by the Mechanism have all been verified by the United Nations, they represent only a mere fraction of violations committed in Syria as of today.

Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis in March 2011, the United Nations has verified through the Mechanism that more than 7,000 children have lost their lives or have been maimed as a result of this conflict. I must stress that this is the verified number alone; the unverified reports reflect numbers that go way beyond 20,000 child casualties. The Mechanism makes a distinction between reported and verified cases. Only verified cases lead to the listing of parties. The methodology of verification is carefully elaborated and requires a thorough triangulation of information procedures, which makes it a very strict mechanism that generates data that appears lower than figures in other monitoring initiatives and mechanisms of the United Nations. Indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks by all parties, of which now we tally over 88 — including the use of weapons prohibited under international law, aerial attacks, mortars and rockets, indiscriminate shelling and improvised explosive devices — have been used against civilian areas and civilian infrastructures and have had a deadly toll on children.

As Council members know, the Mechanism reports on six grave violations: recruitment and use, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, attacks on hospitals and schools, abductions, and denial of humanitarian access. Over the years the Secretary-General has listed in the annexes of his annual report on children and armed conflict seven parties committing grave violations against children in Syria.

Since the beginning of 2018 alone — a period of six months — the Mechanism has verified over 1,200 violations against children. Of these, more than 600 children have been killed or maimed, more than 180 recruited and used, and more than 60 schools attacked, while over 100 attacks on hospitals and medical facilities or personnel have been all verified. Most of these verified grave violations have occurred in the last six months in the context of military surges by various parties in the areas of Afrin, Hama, Idlib, eastern Ghouta and Dar'a. Each of these surges has resulted in hundreds of thousands of displaced people, of which a vast proportion are children.

As war rages, detention of children for alleged association with armed forces and armed groups has exponentially increased. In 2018 alone, over 1,300 children are reportedly held by parties in the north-eastern part of Syria, of which the Mechanism could verify only seven cases since the beginning of the year due to the inaccessibility of the area and the relevant actors. In other parts of Syria, detention of children is also reported, and the Mechanism was able to verify more than 300 cases since 2014.

The figures emerging from the first six months of 2018 reflect large increases, as compared to previous similar reporting periods. For example, in the first quarter of 2018, there was an increase of 25 per cent in recruitment and use of children, and a 348 per cent increase in killing and maiming, both as compared to the previous quarter. In fact, the total number of grave violations for the first quarter marks a 109 per cent increase over the last quarter of 2017.

Attribution for these violations indicates that all recruitment and use in 2018 have been committed by non-State actors, while most killing and maiming figures are attributed to Syrian Government and pro-Government forces. Although figures for the beginning of 2018 include few verified cases of sexual violence and abduction, these are violations reported across all the years since the establishment of the Mechanism in Syria. For example, boys and girls have been sexually abused and exploited, sold as sexual slaves and forcibly married to fighters for the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. Rape has been used as a means of torture, especially when children were being deprived of their liberty. Despite being underreported, cases of sexual violence against children in Syria also reflect the despicable nature of this conflict.

Attacks on schools and medical facilities have been one of the persistent features of the conflict in Syria. One in three schools are estimated to be out of use — either damaged, destroyed or used as a shelter or for military purposes. An estimated 2.1 million children alone are out of school inside Syria, due to a range of factors including insecurity, lack of facilities and quality education, poverty and displacement.

In the upcoming months, the Security Council-mandated country report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Syria will be published, covering almost five years of the conflict. The findings of the Mechanism over that period of time are utterly unsettling. I am deeply disturbed by the stories of children born and raised throughout this conflict, children who have never seen peace in Syria, children who have suffered repeatedly from all types of violations in their homes, communities, schools, detention centres and in refugee and internally displaced persons settings. We have to think that these children are in severe psychosocial distress. They do not know the meaning of the word "peace".

The violence Syrian children have been subjected to, and are still being subject to — as well as the pain they and their families have faced throughout these years of crisis — is simply unacceptable. Given the dynamics and violations occurring against children this year, I am especially concerned about children deprived of their liberty and the conditions of detention of children allegedly associated with parties to the conflict. These children must be treated primarily as victims of violations of international law.

I call on all parties involved in the conflict in Syria to comply with applicable obligations under the Convention of the Rights of the Child and its optional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and to give civilian child-protection actors access to children deprived of liberty for association or alleged association with armed forces and groups. I further call on all parties to the conflict in Syria to take immediate measures to ensure that their military operations are conducted in full compliance with international law, including through respecting the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. Humanitarian access must be granted to all children in all locations in Syria, including through the implementation of humanitarian corridors and pauses for the delivery of humanitarian assistance that are indispensable for their survival and development, without any discrimination. This standard should also be applicable to returnees.

I would like to conclude by emphasizing that children continue to be disproportionately affected by the armed conflict in Syria. It is essential that the Security Council does everything in its power to put pressure on parties to the conflict to comply with their obligations under international law and ensure that children are no longer subject to grave violations of their rights. Parties to conflict must take immediate, concrete and effective action to prevent child casualties during the conduct of hostilities, including by immediately ceasing to use means and methods of warfare that are inherently indiscriminate or disproportionate in nature and ensure that children deprived of their liberty be treated primarily as victims of violations of international law.

There is clearly no alternative other than peace to stop the increasing violations against children in Syria. We must make peace a priority and, in the pursuit of that peace, we must ensure that all peace negotiations include children at the centre of the discussion. Nowhere it is more important to consider children as an indispensable part of peace processes than in the Syrian conflict. There will be hundreds of thousands of children who will need assistance and we must prepare to meet their needs.

The prolonged exposure to war has immediate and major detrimental effects on the psychosocial well-being of children. If left untreated, the long-term negative consequences will affect them for the rest of their lives. In that regard, recalling the recently adopted resolution 2427 (2018), children affected by the conflict must be able to access protection programmes designed to meet their needs in an integrated and comprehensive approach to mental health and psychosocial support, including the specific needs of children with disabilities. The international community must prioritize funding and provision for quality education for all children at all levels, from the initial stages of child development through to vocational training for youth. No one must be left behind, especially those who, through no fault of their own, have been robbed of their most important developmental years.

It is time for the children of Syria to believe in their own future and to learn what peace means. It is time for them to retake the childhood that was taken away from them. It is time for them to stop being victims and become game changers in the restoration of normality in peace and justice. They have been used and abused by, in and for this armed conflict for far too long.

The President: I thank Ms. Gamba for her briefing.

I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank the presidency of the Council for proposing to focus today's meeting on the plight of children in Syria. Let me also thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Mark Lowcock, and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, for their briefings and for the relentless efforts of the humanitarian workers in all areas of conflict.

I will focus my remarks on two key points: the humanitarian situation and Syria's children.

With regard to the humanitarian situation, as the Syrian crisis enters its eighth year, our Syrian brothers are facing a humanitarian catastrophe and extremely difficult economic and social situation. Thousands of Syrians are subjected daily to the most heinous and blatant violations of international law and international human rights law as a result of the ongoing cycle of violence, which to date has claimed the lives of no fewer than 400,000 people, including a large number of women and children.

We have followed with great concern the military escalation in south-western Syria over the past few weeks, which has led to the displacement of almost 300,000 people and the deterioration of the humanitarian situation of innocent civilians, including women, children and the elderly. Although this number has decreased following the return of some refugees to their homes, many of them remain in dire need of urgent humanitarian assistance. We share the Secretary-General's concerns with regard to ending cross-border humanitarian operations in south-western Syria as a result of the recent escalation. We underscore the need to providing humanitarian assistance to all those in need in south-western Syria as soon as possible, lifting all restrictions on international organizations and agencies and delivering assistance to those in need throughout Syria.

The war in Syria, which began in 2011, has created the largest refugee crisis in modern history. The Syrian people have been left with no choice but to escape or to live under the stress of armed conflict. It has led to more than 5 million Syrian refugees abroad, including 2 million children, and nearly 6 million internally displaced persons, 2.5 million of whom are children. That represents a total of 11 million Syrians. We underscore that the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes must be safe, voluntary and dignified.

Undoubtedly, the children of Syria continue to pay the highest price of a war that has been going on for eight years in their country. They have been robbed of their innocence, dreams and their inherent right to life and dignity. The suffering of Syria's children is a stigma for the international community. Millions of children know only war. They have experienced only war since they were born. They remain the most vulnerable and the most in need of protection. Therefore, we must not disappoint them because they are the future of Syria.

There are more than 5 million children in Syria in need of humanitarian assistance. As Ms. Virginia Gamba stated a while ago, children in Syria are subjected to grave suffering as a result of the ongoing conflict. They are killed, abducted, kidnapped, recruited, tortured and subjected to other tragedies. The conflict has affected almost 2 million children, who have not even received basic education, which could result in a whole generation losing their right to learn.

In 2017, as Ms. Gamba just stated, 67 schools and more than 108 medical facilities were targeted. This information is included in the report on children and armed conflict. We strongly condemn the systematic targeting of vital and basic facilities, including schools, hospitals and medical facilities. They represent a red line, as underscored in resolution 2427 (2018). This resolution, which was adopted unanimously at the beginning of the current month and was sponsored by Kuwait and 97 States Members of the United Nations, is explicit and clear. It condemns the attacks on schools and hospitals, and calls upon all parties to the armed conflict not to thwart children's access to education and health services. We urge all parties to the Syrian crisis to implement this resolution. Furthermore, resolution 2401 (2018) is yet another example of a blatant violation pertaining to Security Council resolutions. Although it was adopted unanimously and called for a ceasefire without delay and the delivery of humanitarian access to besieged areas, that resolution, unfortunately, was not implemented.

In conclusion, the State of Kuwait reaffirms that there is no military solution to the Syrian crisis. We must redouble our efforts to end the suffering of an entire people — the brotherly Syrian people, who are rich in history, culture and civilization. We must end the repercussions of a crisis that is destroying the region

and the world at large, by supporting a political solution in line with relevant Security Council resolutions, especially resolution 2254 (2015), and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). This would lead to a comprehensive settlement, agreed by all components of the Syrian people, in order to meet their legitimate aspirations and achieve the unity, independence and sovereignty of Syria.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Special Representative Gamba for their detailed and disturbing briefings and for their important work on Syria.

The United States condemns the attack that took place earlier this week in Syria's Al-Suwayda province, for which the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham has claimed responsibility. The barbaric attack killed scores of civilians and we send our sympathies to the families of the victims.

Civilians, in particular children, continue to bear the brunt of ongoing violence in Syria. Each month, Mr. Lowcock briefs us on desperate civilians caught up in military offensives and the thousands who are denied access to the most basic necessities, including life-saving aid. The most recent military campaign in the south-west is yet another dark chapter in Syria's tragic story. This month, Special Representative Gamba has provided us with an even closer look at the misery. It is clear that Syria's children have experienced an almost unimaginable level of suffering and trauma that they will carry with them for the rest of their lives.

The statistics cited here and in the monthly reports on Syria should not be misinterpreted. Yes, the number of besieged areas has been reduced to zero, but not because the regime lifted sieges. Instead, it is because it mercilessly followed through with its surrender-or-starve campaign. Similarly, the number of Syrians living in hard-to-reach areas is down from just over 2 million last month to 1.5 million in July — not because the regime is allowing more access, but because it has taken more territory by force. Sadly, more than 13 million people in Syria still require humanitarian assistance, and at least 6 million of those are children.

In south-west Syria, the regime's military offensives since 17 June have displaced more than 325,000 civilians, approximately half of whom are children. Yet, humanitarians are largely unable to reach those vulnerable populations and supplies are dwindling. Even more concerning is the fact that this loss of humanitarian access in south-west Syria includes the halting of United Nations cross-border aid deliveries demanded by the Council, most recently in resolution 2393 (2017).Nothing about the regime's failure to facilitate humanitarian access has changed since last month's Council meeting (see S/PV.8296). Instead of placing the needs of its own population first, the regime continues to weaponize humanitarian assistance and withhold access as a tool to force reconciliation in areas formerly held by the armed opposition.

We call on the Syrian regime and its Russian allies to allow the United Nations to resume cross-border convoys from Jordan and to facilitate delivery of cross-line assistance from Damascus to people in need, in line with the Council's previous resolutions on the matter. For the 800,000 people dependent on life-saving cross-border assistance, United Nations operations need to continue.

Turning to Idlib, the Syrian regime and its supporters have continued their aggressive actions and are building up their military forces for their next major offensive. The United Nations dire warnings have been clear and unmistakable — a Syrian regime military campaign in Idlib, akin to what we saw in eastern Ghouta and Aleppo, would result in a disastrous humanitarian crisis. The Council urgently needs to put measures in place to protect civilians and ensure humanitarian access in Idlib, where hundreds of thousands of people are at risk.

The United States will once again put on record that United Nations humanitarian convoys are welcome at any time in Rukban. We welcome this assistance and are ready to do everything we can to facilitate it.

In Raqqa, removing unexploded ordinance is one of our top priorities; it is a critical first step for humanitarian and stabilization assistance. To date, coalition-funded explosive hazards removal teams have cleared more than 20,000 explosive hazards from 15.5 million square meters of territory in Manbij, Tabqa and Raqqa cities and trained over 300 Syrian nationals to conduct marking, survey and clearance up to international humanitarian mine action standards. The task is not easy, but it is vital to ensure that Syrians can return home safely.

The United States continues to support refugee returns when they are safe, voluntary and dignified. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

assesses that it is not yet safe for large-scale refugee returns in Syria. We also remind the Council that the cessation of violence is a critical element for planning successful large-scale refugee returns. Russia is still not upholding its commitment to maintaining a de-escalation zone in south-western Syria. If Russia is serious about its concern for refugees and other displaced Syrians, it should work with the Syrian regime to stop the violence and allow unhindered humanitarian access to civilians in need.

In conclusion, the positive developments are few and far between, but we must find light where we can. We are glad that children and their families in two previously besieged parts of Idlib were finally able to depart for safer areas and no longer face being cut off from the basic elements of survival. Now, we must find a way to protect the other children in Idlib in the weeks and months ahead.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Mr. Mark Lowcock and Ms. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter for their briefings, which are always very enlightening, but unfortunately also bleak, as well as for their tireless efforts and those of their teams.

Civilians continue to be the victims and targets of the regime's military strategy. The retaking of south-west Syria is another episode in the humanitarian disaster that has been unfolding in Syria since 2011. What remains of the de-escalation zone and the commitments undertaken by the guarantors of the ceasefire to reducing violence and ensuring respect for international humanitarian law?

In Idlib, the threat of a regime offensive that has been publicly announced by Bashar Al-Assad is a looming tragedy for the 2.2 million people present there. Such an offensive would also be a source of further destabilization not only for northern Syria and Turkey, but also for the entire region, specifically as a result of the dispersal of terrorist fighters to which it will inevitably give rise. A new, bloody offensive in Idlib will open chapter two of the Syrian tragedy — that of a regional spillover of the conflict.

In that context, I would like to highlight three key priorities that should serve as a guide for our action: the protection of vulnerable people, ensuring humanitarian access, and achieving a lasting political solution in Syria with the support of the United Nations.

The first priority is the protection of all vulnerable populations. I would like to echo Ms. Gamba's remarks and stress the seriousness of the violations against children in Syria, which has made it the most dangerous country for children in 2018. Tens of thousands of children have been killed or wounded since the outbreak of the conflict as a result of indiscriminate shelling by the regime. An entire generation has been out of school, with consequences in terms of social and professional integration and potential radicalization. The recruitment and use of children, in particular by terrorist groups, such as Da'esh, continue to increase. Currently, 5.3 million children need humanitarian assistance. There are tangible and immediately operational measures and we call on all parties to the conflict to urgently adopt them. It is important to refrain from targeting schools and school infrastructure and to protect civilian and residential areas in the conduct of operations.

I also want to revisit the urgent need to ensure the security of humanitarian workers. It is important to ensure that humanitarian workers in areas that have been retaken by the regime will be protected and that humanitarian services for the people in those areas will continue. We are heartened by the successful rescue operation of a number of White Helmets, who have saved many lives at the risk of their own and have been constantly targeted by the Syrian regime. Not all White Helmets have been evacuated and those remaining in Syria are now under serious threat. We must secure safety guarantees for those individuals and their families and ensure that they are not the target of retaliation by the regime.

I also want to raise the issue of the protection of journalists and their families trapped in Syria. As the Council is aware, this issue is a priority for France. I call for further collective mobilizing to that end.

With regard to refugees, the conditions for a safe, dignified and voluntary return have not been met. Their safety is not ensured because the regime continues to violate all ceasefires. Many of them are exposed to abuses or are forcibly recruited into the regime's army upon their return. Law No. 10, which makes population displacement irreversible and is part of the regime's demographic engineering strategy, constitutes a major obstacle to the return of refugees and displaced persons. Like the European Union (EU), we demand its repeal, as well as indemnities and substantive work on property restitution and recruitment. I would like to point out

that this question is not limited to a legal text, because Law No. 10 merely formalizes and systematizes the regime's practices.

Secondly, I would like to highlight the priority of humanitarian access, which continues to deteriorate in Syria. The Syrian regime continues to impose unacceptable obstacles to the delivery of aid, in violation of international humanitarian law. Letting that indispensable aid through everywhere, especially in hard-to-reach areas, is an obligation of all parties. It is intolerable to deprive populations of vital aid of which they are sorely lacking, whether in Idlib, eastern Ghouta or Quneitra.

We are particularly concerned about the situation in the south of the country, where no cross-border convoy from Jordan has been arranged since 25 June. Only aid from Damascus remains, but it is distributed exclusively in areas under the control of the regime. We therefore call on the actors with influence on the regime to ensure that cross-border convoys via Jordan are restored and secured as soon as possible. All convoys must be able to move safely and unhindered throughout the country, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions and international humanitarian law.

It is imperative that the entire population in need receive humanitarian aid on the basis of a neutral evaluation conducted by the United Nations. France has fully mobilized to meet that challenge. It is with that objective in mind that President Macron and President Putin decided to undertake a joint project to deliver humanitarian aid to Douma, in eastern Ghouta, where the needs of the population remain considerable several months after the end of the fighting. Forty-four tons of medical equipment and basic necessities were transported from France to Syria via a Russian plane during the night of 20-21 July. The distribution of non-food items to beneficiaries took place yesterday, 26 July, in partnership with the United Nations. Medicine and the medical equipment were received by the Douma health centre.

In that context, I commend the work of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations agencies, which have spared no effort to ensure that the people of Ghouta receive that aid under the best possible conditions. That result remains modest in relation to the magnitude of the needs, but it makes a real difference to the people of a particularly hard-hit area, which that aid would undoubtedly not have reached otherwise. More needs to be done, as Mark Lowcock rightly pointed out.

Thirdly, the humanitarian situation will never be addressed in a sustainable manner without a breakthrough in the United Nations-led political process. Despite its reconquests, the regime has achieved nothing but victories without peace. As resolution 2254 (2015) recalls, without a political transition, Syria will remain a lasting factor of regional destabilization, for want of the voluntary return of refugees and displaced persons, in safe and dignified conditions; the financing of reconstruction by multilateral donors; and national reconciliation that makes it possible to stamp out terrorism, the presence of foreign militias and the persistence of a civil war mindset. On these various points, the deadlock will persist unless we advance the political process.

In that regard, the pursuit of the regime's military strategy undermines the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General to bring the actors in the conflict closer together and relaunch the political process around the formation of a constitutional committee. It is imperative that the regime's supporters exert the pressure necessary to ensure an environment conducive to the continuation of the consultations launched by the Special Envoy.

In the same way, I repeat here clearly before the Council that we will not take part in the reconstruction of Syria without the effective implementation of a political transition, with a genuine constitutional and electoral process. That is sine qua non for the stability of the country and our contribution towards financing reconstruction. Otherwise, there is no reason why France and the EU should commit themselves to financing reconstruction. To ensure the country's long-term stability through a negotiated political solution, we are sparing no effort to encourage concrete convergence with key players in the conflict, particularly those in Astana and the Small Group.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting on a very this important subject with these impressive briefers. We thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Special Representative of the Secretary General Gamba for their sobering briefings.

Frankly speaking, I was shocked to hear yet again about the terrible suffering of Syrian children. Children should be protected, including in times of war, yet such

protection is completely lacking in the Syrian conflict. We express our strong support for the mandate of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. We are grateful for the extremely valuable work that the Special Representative and her team have done regarding Syria — valuable work in spite of the lack of access and cooperation from the Syrian regime. It is deplorable that the Syrian regime ignores its international obligations, even when it comes to the protection of children. We expect the upcoming country report to address those issues in clear terms, and we support the idea of more frequent country reports. Today we are talking about the humanitarian situation in Syria, but let us not forget the fate of the 6.5 million refugees who have been forced to flee their country.

In my statement I will address three points: first, the situation in southern Syria; secondly, the situation in Idlib; and thirdly, the continuing violation of humanitarian law and humanitarian principles in Syria.

First, we express grave concern about the violence in southern Syria. Hostilities in the past few weeks have been marked by civilian casualties, attacks on schools and hospitals and the rapid displacement of around 180,000 individuals. We strongly condemn the recent series of suicide attacks by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. As Mr. Staffan de Mistura told us on Wednesday, 180,000 civilians have become internally displaced as a result of the ground and aerial offensives of the Syrian regime and its allies in the south-west. Some of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) near Quneitra remain without shelter and are exposed to the sun, in temperatures reaching up to 40°C. Humanitarian partners based in Damascus have not been granted access due to a lack of necessary approvals by the regime. Cross-border humanitarian operations are also suspended.

The Syrian regime should respect international humanitarian law and provide sustained access for humanitarian actors and protection to all people in need, including IDPs located near the Golan border. We call on all parties to provide cross-border humanitarian convoys with the necessary security guarantees, including the relevant guarantors of the de-escalation zone, as it was called at the time. Cross-border aid delivery remains of paramount importance and must be facilitated where it is the most effective, or the only way to reach those in need.

Let me welcome the humanitarian operation that has led to the evacuation of a group of White Helmets and their family members from southern Syria. The Kingdom of the Netherlands is currently looking into the possibilities of a contribution to the resettlement plans.

We pay tribute to the selfless work of the White Helmets in all parts of Syria, who have saved countless Syrian civilian lives. Let me underline that all sides of the conflict should accept and protect all aid workers. It is deeply disturbing that instead, many have to fear for their lives because of the advance of Syrian troops and their allies. We regret that the White Helmets in particular have been targeted both on the ground and here at the United Nations, by slanderous accusations. Let me also underline the point made by our French colleague about the need to guarantee the safety of journalists in conflict.

That brings me to my second point — the situation in Idlib. Currently, the Idlib region is completely surrounded by forces of the Syrian regime. We are deeply concerned about the fate of the 2.3 million civilians in Idlib, of which approximately 1.3 million are displaced persons from elsewhere in Syria. They are under constant threat of air strikes and of hostilities between armed groups. An assault by the Syrian regime will lead to a humanitarian catastrophe with grave regional consequences.

Let me stress that the civilians in Idlib are neither terrorists, nor combatants. Civilians must be protected during armed conflict. Medical facilities need to be protected too, as the Council so clearly underlined in resolution 2286 (2016). The Astana guarantors have a particular responsibility to work on arrangements to prevent further human suffering, protect civilians and provide a non-violent exit to this growing tragedy. In our opinion, the Council should send a very strong signal to the regime and its allies not to attack Idlib. We regret that we were unable to agree on such a signal last Wednesday in our meeting.

That brings me to my third point — the continuing violations of humanitarian law and humanitarian principles in Syria. Years of bombardments, sieges and deprivation by the Syrian regime have in the past months led to the regime taking over several severely damaged areas. Even now, United Nations access to those areas is consistently denied by the regime. The Organization is often banned from inter-agency convoys, meaning that United Nations coordination and monitoring of the

distribution of aid is hampered. As a consequence, aid is not being delivered to those who need it most.

Let me give an example. Between January and April, a mere 22 per cent of aid in territories controlled by the Syrian regime was delivered to those in acute need. That is simply unacceptable. We therefore call on the Syrian regime, the Russian Federation and Iran to immediately allow unimpeded and sustained access for all humanitarian actors. If the regime continues to obstruct the ability of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to work from Damascus, it effectively blocks the possibilities for principled, evidence-based humanitarian action in Syria. As a consequence, many more innocent people and many more innocent children will suffer.

In conclusion, let me stress the need for accountability for the ongoing crimes committed in Syria by all parties. We will continue our efforts in that regard both on and off the Council. We call on those with influence to ensure that Syrians in need can be helped by the United Nations. Furthermore, they should convince the regime to reconsider Law Number 10, as stressed by our French colleague. Complying with international humanitarian law and providing humanitarian access remain essential to improve the conditions of the suffering Syrian civilians. That particularly applies to the suffering Syrian children, as Virginia Gamba so clearly described. Respect for international humanitarian law is key if we want to prevent a repetition of eastern Aleppo, eastern Ghouta and Dar'a.

Finally, we call for assurances that humanitarian workers in areas that have recently changed control will be protected and that humanitarian services for the people in those areas will continue to be available.

Mr. Tenya (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the convening of this meeting and thank Mark Lowcock and Virginia Gamba for the important work they have been carrying out and for the extremely troubling information they have just provided us. The picture they have painted is bleak. The Syrian conflict continues to claim civilian victims and features scenarios where the risk of new escalation is alarming. Humanitarian assistance is very limited. International law and international humanitarian law continue to be violated with impunity.

Peru deeply regrets that situation and is particularly concerned about the vulnerability of internally displaced persons and refugees, particularly in the southwest of the country. We note that more than 13 million people require humanitarian assistance in Syria, and more than 5 million are children. We underline the ethical and legal commitment of the Syrian authorities and other influential actors on the ground to facilitating full, unimpeded and immediate access to humanitarian assistance from the United Nations and other relevant agencies.

We also stress the need to facilitate the safe and voluntary return of Syrian citizens to their homes and businesses, in accordance with internationally agreed standards. That requires political will, confidence-building and resources. We believe that the support of the international community and the participation of the United Nations is critical.

We note with concern the negative consequences that the implementation of Law 10 would have on millions of displaced persons and on the building of sustainable peace in Syria. Similarly, we are alarmed by the risk of an escalation of violence in Idlib, which could lead to a new hell on Earth. We consider it of the utmost importance to prevent a new humanitarian tragedy, and we stress that the fight against terrorism in no way justifies the violation of human rights or international humanitarian law.

It is important to bear in mind that children are particularly vulnerable. Death, orphanhood, malnutrition, injury, illness, trauma, neglect, destruction of schools — these are the consequences of violence for millions of children in Syria. Many of them have known only conflict and forced displacement. According to the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/724), in 2017 alone, there were almost 3,000 serious violations of children's rights, more than in the previous year. And the number of verified cases of recruitment and use of children for military purposes increased by 13 per cent, mostly in Aleppo, Hama and Idlib provinces.

In view of that, we would like to highlight the timely and necessary emphasis placed by the Swedish presidency on the responsibility to protect them. That means providing them with a peaceful environment in which to recover and develop a life free from violence of all kinds, as part of a comprehensive strategy to resolve the conflict and maintain peace.

I conclude by underlining the particular responsibility of this Council, in line with recent resolution 2427 (2018) on children and armed conflict,

In particular, we emphasize the need to promote rehabilitation activities for recruited children, with a view to facilitating their reintegration into society and building sustainable peace in Syria.

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the convening of this meeting. I take this opportunity to express our gratitude to Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Special Representative Gamba for their illuminating updates on the humanitarian situation in Syria and the impact of the current conflict on children.

We take advantage of this open informative session to condemn in the strongest terms the series of suicide attacks carried out by the Islamic State on the morning of 25 July in many villages of Al-Suwayda province. Those latest attacks, resulting in more than two hundred deaths and a hundred injured, must not undermine the efforts to return to sustainable peace and stability in Syria.

Government forces and local militias, which control much of the country, particularly in the southern region, must step up their presence along the whole eastern administrative border of Suwayda and take provisional control measures with regard to citizens arriving in this area. However, my country's Government wishes to express to the Council its great concern at the situation of insecurity prevailing in the south-west part of the country, given that the clashes, following the implacable logic of military operations, are resulting in hundreds of deaths and injuries as well as the massive displacement of civilians, and are also preventing United Nations entities from sending cross-border humanitarian supplies owing to the lack of security.

The continuing airstrikes against medical and educational facilities and personnel in Idlib, the high levels of contamination by explosives in Raqqa, the presence of numerous improvised explosive devices and the significant number of civilians who remain in camps for displaced persons in eastern Ghouta all attest to the precarious humanitarian situation. It is therefore vital that United Nations humanitarian agencies and their partners spare no effort and create synergies to provide assistance to as many people in need as possible, and also that the parties of the conflict guarantee safe, sustained and unimpeded access to inter-institutional humanitarian convoys, in compliance with resolution 2401 (2018).

Given this situation of devastation and anguish, Equatorial Guinea cannot but join its voice to those calling for the defence and protection of the rights of children in armed conflict, particularly in Syria, the issue with which we are dealing today. This was made clear with the adoption of resolution 2427 (2018) during the open debate held on 9 July (see S/PV.8305). There is a need to tackle factors such as the lack of humanitarian assistance, which exposes Syrian children to a greater risk of violence and exploitation, including child labour, recruitment and forced marriage. This prolonged conflict has without a doubt had a significant impact on children throughout the country and could cause post-traumatic stress disorder and toxic stress, which can lead to long-term physical and mental damage if not appropriately treated.

Air strikes against schools and educational personnel and the use of schools for military purposes also significantly affect children, increasing their risk of suffering and dying from vaccine-preventable diseases. In order to remedy this situation, the parties to the conflict must consistently abide by their commitment to protecting the rights of children.

The information provided by Ms. Gamba is very significant and should induce all parties to the conflict to reflect very deeply. We have said on many occasions that this conflict cannot have a military solution. But even if there is an insistence on not reaching agreement, the parties must at least respect humanitarian law and use force proportionately so as to save the lives of the most vulnerable, that is to say, children.

Let me conclude by expressing the firm support of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea for the recent joint initiative of the Russian Federation and the French Republic aimed at providing humanitarian assistance to the inhabitants of eastern Ghouta and Douma. This initiative is the result of a coordination meeting between the leaders of both countries held in May, in St. Petersburg, and aims to provide first-aid medical teams for more than 500 people with serious injuries and medical supplies to treat 15,000 minor injuries. This supplements the assistance targeted at meeting the urgent humanitarian needs of the people of eastern Ghouta. This Franco-Russian cooperation deserves our full attention and praise, because it shows how, with a little political will, the countries of the Security Council with influence upon the parties to the conflict can, if they so wish, reach an understanding and work to ensure that the conflict is resolved peacefully.

Mr. Radomski (Poland): I should like to thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock and Special Representative Virginia Gamba for their impressive briefings. We deeply appreciate their dedicated service.

Even as we meet today to discuss once again the humanitarian situation in Syria, military logic, unfortunately, continues to drive developments on the ground. We still face unceasing and widespread violence as well as violations of international law, including abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law. The most striking examples of this were the recent events in the south-west de-escalation zone, where more than 55,000 children remain deprived of access to humanitarian assistance, and a total of 100,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) have fled the recent wave of violence.

Taking into consideration those recent events, we strongly condemn the intensification of military operations. Unhindered, safe and sustainable humanitarian access must be secured, as called for in resolution 2401 (2018). Unfortunately, even after the Syrian Government has retaken control of many areas of the country, we still lack regular access to areas in need.

We express our grave concern about the humanitarian situation in south-west Syria as well as in the north-western part of the country. The military operations led by Government forces, with the support of Russia, have already displaced thousands of civilians, the majority of whom are moving towards the northern part of the country. As we heard in the briefing, Idlib governorate is struggling with a new significant influx of IDPs, leaving it with the highest total number of displaced persons in Syria.

The humanitarian imperative should be our primary priority. We would like to reiterate our strong call on all parties with influence on the situation on the ground to take all actions necessary to achieve a full cessation of hostilities throughout the Syrian territory in order to avert tragic scenarios such as those we have already witnessed in eastern Ghouta, eastern Aleppo and Dar'a.

Let me emphasize the importance of protecting the most vulnerable groups, especially children, women and religious minorities, who are too often affected by the conflict in Syria.

Let me also stress the need for the protection of refugees. We support the safe, voluntary and dignified return of the Syrian people under a United Nations-led framework once conditions allow. In this context, I should like also to express our concern about the so-called Syrian Law No. 10, on property rights. We are deeply worried by its possible significant repercussions on the future return of Syrian IDPs and refugees. That is why we underline the need for the Security Council to remain seized of the matter.

This seventh year of the armed conflict in Syria means that millions of children have known only life in fear. They suffer from malnutrition and are deprived of their fundamental rights, including the rights to food, water, sanitation, education and medical care. The denial of humanitarian access to children has traumatic consequences. There is also a need to accelerate humanitarian mine-action programmes by prioritizing areas to which civilians are returning in order to address the growing number of child victims.

We are very concerned at the impact of the conflict on education. With more than 2 million Syrian children out of school and one third of schools unusable, the conflict has devastated the lives of a generation of young people. The lack of access to education and the trauma experienced by children, including that due to sexual violence, has created a lost generation in Syria, which will affect the future of the country and that of the whole region, undermining prospects for the reconstruction and recovery of a free and democratic Syria.

Therefore, we want to stress the importance of ensuring funding for protection programmes to support children affected by the conflict, as well as quality education for all children, including girls, at all levels. In that regard, we strongly condemn the continued attacks on schools and the use of schools for military purposes. Let me recall that this year's annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2018/465) listed 67 verified attacks on schools and education personnel in 2017, most of which were air strikes.

In conclusion, let me stress the necessity of maintaining the unity of the Council on the question of the full implementation of the relevant humanitarian resolutions throughout Syria, especially as we again face an increase of violence, this time in the northern part of the country. The adoption of resolution 2401 (2018) was just the beginning of the process. We again call on all stakeholders with influence on the ground to take the necessary steps to ensure that the fighting

stops, the Syrian people are protected and, finally, urgent humanitarian access is provided.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his very detailed briefing. I would also like to thank Special Representative Gamba for her briefing. It was particularly useful to be reminded of the horrific suffering of Syrian children throughout the conflict.

We should all remember that one of the sparks that lit the flame of this conflict was the arrest and detention by Syrian Mukhabarat of schoolchildren from Dar'a simply for posting anti-regime graffiti on a school wall. We should all remember the horrific recruitment and enslavement of children by Da'esh, and we should all remember the appallingly high number of children killed and maimed by indiscriminate aerial bombardment, whether in Aleppo, eastern Ghouta or other areas, by the Syrian regime and its allies.

I was particularly struck by Ms. Gamba's conclusion that most of the killing and maiming of children has been attributed to the Syrian Government and pro-Government forces. I would strongly echo her call on the parties for three things: to respect international humanitarian law, to comply with obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol and to allow access for civilian child protection actors to children deprived of liberty for their association with armed groups. Given the presence of the representative of the Syrian Government in this Chamber today, I would hope that in his statement he could commit his Government to fulfilling those three requests that she made.

We join the United States and others in condemning the appalling terrorists attack claimed by Da'esh in Al-Suwayda province on 25 July, which killed many innocent civilians. Such callous disregard for human life is horrifying. Our ministers have expressed their condolences to the families of the victims and reaffirmed our commitment to peace in Syria and Da'esh's lasting defeat.

The Kuwaiti Ambassador has already reminded us that in February, all Council members voted in favour of resolution 2401 (2018) whereby we demanded a cessation of hostilities and unimpeded humanitarian access. It is to our deep regret that the Syrian authorities have made no effort to abide by the terms of that resolution or, indeed, those of the de-escalation agreement reached between Russia and the United States last year.

We, like others, are deeply concerned about the Russian-backed offensive by the Al-Assad regime into the de-escalation area in south-west Syria. Over the past month, that offensive has had a devastating impact on civilians living in the area, with more than a quarter of a million civilians displaced. UNICEF has reported that approximately half of all those who have fled the recent wave of violence are children.

People fleeing fighting must have freedom of movement to be able to choose where they go and be allowed to return home once it is safe to do so so that they can reclaim their property and rebuild their lives. They must be protected against regime reprisals and have access to essential supplies and basic services. We expect the regime and Russia to ensure the safety and security of all those in southern Syria, including the safety of humanitarian actors and those active in civil society.

Like the representatives of Peru, the Netherlands and others countries who spoke today, we are extremely concerned about the situation in Idlib, where, as we heard from Staffan de Mistura the other day, close to 3 million civilians are in fear of attacks by the regime and its backers, and more than 50 per cent of the population have been displaced from their homes, in some cases multiple times. The dire humanitarian situation will continue unless real, unhindered and sustained humanitarian access is allowed. We urge Russia and pro-regime forces to comply with de-escalation and remove all obstacles to the delivery of humanitarian aid.

We are particularly concerned about the lack of humanitarian access to areas that have recently come under regime control. We urge Russia to use its influence to secure rapid and unhindered access to those areas for humanitarian agencies. Such access needs to be sustained rather than one-off token convoys. The delivery of aid also needs to be transparent and subject to appropriate accountability and oversight.

Cross-border aid represents a significant proportion of all United Nations humanitarian deliveries. It is essential that humanitarian assistance be able to reach people throughout Syria through the most direct routes. In that regard, I would like to echo the call made by the representative of France for Russia and Syria to provide the United Nations with the necessary security assurances to continue using the Al-Ramtha crossing from Jordan. This Council has mandated the United

Nations to use the crossing. Resolution 2393 (2017) remains in force and is a key element to ensuring that aid is delivered to those in need.

In concluding, let me say that it is clear from today's briefing that there are several ways in which the Syrian authorities and their allies could improve the humanitarian situation in the country. On that basis, I would like to ask the Syrian authorities and Russia to do three concrete things: first, ensure safe, immediate, unimpeded and sustained access to Quneitra for the United Nations and its humanitarian partners; secondly, ensure safe, immediate, unimpeded and sustained access for the United Nations and its partners to priority areas that have recently changed control, including Douma and the towns of eastern Ghouta, southern Damascus and northern, rural Homs; and thirdly and finally, give the Council assurances — and I hope that we might hear such assurances from the Syrian representative later in this meeting — that humanitarian workers in areas that have recently changed control will be protected and that humanitarian services for the populations in those areas will continue.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the briefings by Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock and by Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, to whom we reiterate our support for the sensitive work that they are carrying out.

We express our regret that this conflict has lasted for eight years, and we continue to bear witness to the unrelenting siege and violence suffered by the Syrian people, especially those most vulnerable, like children, who in some cases have known only this reality since birth. Sadly, if appropriate measures are not taken, most of them will have to live with persistent psychological trauma. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 13.1 million people remain in need humanitarian assistance, of whom approximately 5.3 million are children. There are approximately 6.1 million internally displaced persons, of whom 2.6 million are children, and some 200,000 of those children live in difficult-to-access areas. We must prevent those figures from growing larger.

We are alarmed by the escalation of violence in south-west Syria and call for a cessation of hostilities in the framework of resolution 2401 (2018). Any increase in tensions must be avoided in order not to further destabilize the region. We also reiterate the importance of safeguarding the lives of thousands of civilians who continue to move into the city of Idlib, including those children and their families who are swelling the numbers of persons internally displaced by of violence. It is essential to avoid any kind of tension or escalation of violence in that area so as to avoid a major tragedy. To that end, the full implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) is indispensable. In that connection, we highlight the different initiatives that allowed local agreements to be reached to facilitate not only the entry of humanitarian assistance, but also the evacuation of people in need.

The necessary measures must also be taken to prevent the resurgence of terrorist groups and to stop further violence. We strongly condemn the attack on the city of Al-Suwayda, which resulted in more than two hundred deaths, and those responsible for those heinous attacks must be held accountable.

We repudiate all attacks on civilian facilities, and therefore we call on the parties to respect their obligations under international law and international humanitarian law, including with regard to the protection of civilians, hospitals and educational institutions. We regret that, according to figures from OCHA and UNICEF, more than 2.7 million Syrian children have not attended school since the beginning of the conflict. According to the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/724), 104,000 children benefited from essential learning materials and remedial education, and 172,000 children benefited from protection and psychosocial support services.

However, we believe that more must be done for such a vulnerable population. We must do everything we can to get these children back into school. We cannot allow their first lessons in life to be forced displacement or shelter. Measures should also be taken to keep them from being subjected to sexual violence or recruitment.

We highlight the tireless work of the various humanitarian agencies and workers who have put their own lives at risk in providing the humanitarian access that so many need. We note that, according to the latest report, more than 218,000 people in hard-to-reach areas were served, and that a total of 3 million children received care from UNICEF. We also note that more than 1 million children and mothers had access to first aid and that around 293,000 children and pregnant and breastfeeding motners had received nutritional

supplements. We call on the Syrian Government to cooperate in that matter and to coordinate more closely and actively with United Nations agencies and their representatives so that that assistance may continue to increase. That is why visa authorizations are urgently required, as well as authorizations for the entry of convoys, including cross-border convoys.

In addition, we highlight the technical assessment conducted by the United Nations Department of Safety and Security and the United Nations Mine Action Service in the city of Raqqa to ensure the clearance of explosive remnants of war. We believe that that is a basic and urgent action that could avoid fatalities and allow the population to return to their daily lives. It would also allow the displaced population and refugees to gradually return to their homes. That return must be safe, dignified, voluntary and informed, as it must be throughout Syria, .

The reduction of violence on the ground must be based on increased confidence-building among the parties involved. Relieving the humanitarian situation of the civilian population, especially the most vulnerable, such as children, must be a priority on the agenda of political dialogue and high-level diplomacy. We reiterate that the only way to resolve this conflict is through an inclusive, dialogue-based and concerted political process, led by the Syrian people and allowing for a peaceful solution.

Finally, we highlight the work that Special Representative Virginia Gamba has been doing on behalf of children in armed conflict and encourage her to continue her important work in coordination with the agencies of the United Nations, Member States, and regional and subregional organizations, in accordance with resolution 2427 (2018). We reiterate the full support of my delegation.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Virginia Gamba for their comprehensive and very informative briefings.

While carefully studying the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/724), we are also closely following developments on the ground. Kazakhstan is concerned about the humanitarian situation in south-western Syria. There can be no alleviation of the suffering without a political agreement in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and other platforms aimed at bringing peace to Syria.

We are also alarmed at the significant increase in the scale, frequency and severity of grave violations affecting children in Syria. Last year was the deadliest for children since the beginning of the conflict, as a result of which 2 million Syrian children became refugees and 2.5 million were internally displaced.

We therefore call on the parties to fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law to reverse the growing number of child victims. Parties need to protect the civilian population and avoid attacking civilian infrastructure, especially schools and health facilities and their personnel. It is equally critical to implement the demining programme to save lives and prevent lifelong injuries. There is also a need for increased support for reintegration and rehabilitation programmes for children formerly associated with armed groups.

Children have been the most vulnerable and affected victims of this seven-year conflict. Every effort must therefore be made to provide schooling, health care and social services so as not to have a lost generation, as they are the country's richest resource.

Resolution 2165 (2014) and subsequent resolutions pertaining to cross-border operations and all other methods of delivery are also essential for a needs-based response. It is crucial to ensure safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access for all civilians in need, especially children, if further deterioration of the humanitarian crisis is to be averted. That is particularly vital across conflict lines under circumstances of changed control.

Kazakhstan endorses the Secretary-General's call to ensure that the necessary security guarantees are in place for the continued rapid and unimpeded delivery of assistance, which must be impartial and unbiased in character. Civilians wishing to flee the fighting should be allowed to do so without hindrance and in full dignity and safety, while those wishing to stay need to be protected. We need to ensure accountability and end impunity for those who perpetrate violations.

The humanitarian crisis requires a holistic and comprehensive approach that goes beyond the mere delivery of aid. It is obvious that the military option is not a solution. Kazakhstan therefore assures its full support for the relaunching of the political negotiations

through the Astana Process and its guarantor countries. That in turn would also lead to the mitigation of the humanitarian crisis. A durable solution can be reached only through an inclusive dialogue of all stakeholders, including women and young people.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to Mr. Lowcock and Ms. Gamba for their briefings.

The facts on the ground attest to improvements in the situation in Syria, including on the humanitarian front. With the evacuation of residents of Fo'ah and Kafraya, there are no more besieged areas left in the country. As the risks to safety are being reduced in areas recently liberated from terrorists, the stage is gradually being set for the geographical expansion of humanitarian deliveries. However, there are still major problems with humanitarian access in a number of areas that are not controlled by Damascus, including those occupied by the so-called coalition, in violation of Syria's sovereignty. Thus no significant progress has been seen in the provision of vital supplies for the inhabitants of the Rukban camp, located in a closed zone around the United States Al-Tanf military base. Nor do we see anything in the functioning of this camp that contributes to establishing peace and eradicating terrorism.

We are once again obliged to draw attention to the need to prepare for winding down the cross-border mechanism, which the Security Council introduced as a special measure at a time and in circumstances when it was not possible to conduct humanitarian operations in a number of areas from Syrian territory itself. The situation today is fundamentally different, and it makes no sense to continue to maintain this relic of the past, which infringes on Syrian sovereignty. In addition, the Secretary-General's review does not give us a convincing impression of the effectiveness of United Nations control over cross-border supplies and the distribution of goods in Syria. By its nature the mechanism is discriminatory, since it serves only areas temporarily controlled by armed groups.

Russia continues to provide humanitarian assistance to the Syrian side on a daily basis. We regularly present the members of the Security Council with the numbers. More than 2,800 tons of humanitarian cargo have been delivered and more than 86,000 people have been treated by our medics. In the past few years, in cooperation with specialized United Nations bodies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, Russian specialists have provided about 300 humanitarian convoys, sometimes in extremely difficult conditions. We are also carrying out joint humanitarian actions with international partners, a good example of which was the recent delivery of humanitarian supplies to residents of eastern Ghouta mentioned by my French colleague, conducted according to a top-level arrangement between Russia and France, an operation for which Russia provided the transport component. In the past few weeks decisive measures have been taken to eliminate terrorist centres in the southern regions of the country, fully responding to the goals set by the Security Council and in the interests of Syria's immediate neighbours as well as Syria itself. We in Russia have given unfailing attention to the priorities of the regional stakeholders and we maintain intensive contacts with them at various levels.

However, it is still too soon for rosy scenarios. Sadly, it does not lack for moments of tragedy, as my American colleague also mentioned today. We were shocked by the series of terrorist attacks just the other day in Suwayda province whose victims were in the hundreds. The perpetrators of that crime must be severely punished. Where punishing the guilty is concerned, it is crucial to ensure that we have the uncompromising determination of all international stakeholders to fight together and with uniform standards against terrorism in all its forms, as Council resolutions demand.

The implementation of local pacification arrangements is continuing in the areas of Dar'a and Quneitra provinces that have been liberated from terrorists. These were agreed on with the direct participation of specialists from the Russian Centre for the Reconciliation of Opposing Sides. The militants are given the opportunity to take advantage of the State amnesty, regulate their status and join the efforts to restore peaceful life, and many are making that choice. Those who are unwilling to accept reconciliation leave for the northern regions of the country with their family members.

As we have said many times, and I would like to say it again, the real humanitarian workers, whether doctors, teachers or journalists, have nothing to fear from the central authorities' restoration of control in the liberated territories. Those who should fear for their safety are the people hiding an entirely different activity, designed to destroy the Syrian State and spread extremism and false propaganda, behind a

humanitarian facade. We receive requests for help in evacuating all kinds of activists from south-western Syria and review such appeals based on humanitarian considerations and our capabilities. The standouts in this story are the White Helmets, whom my colleagues have already discussed today, who disguise themselves as an organization for Syria's civil defence and yet have taken part in disgusting acts of provocation, including the use of poisonous substances. Their trademark in the information war against Damascus has become the production of videos in which they have cynically exploited little children. We have already reported on such cases a number of times. We believe that once the White Helmets are kicked out, Syria will become safer, and that once these people have moved to their foreign sponsors in Europe and North America they will eventually stop engaging in provocations and refrain from helping terrorists.

As the situation in much of Syria is normalized, the task of returning refugees and internally displaced persons to their permanent homes is becoming ever more urgent. It will reduce the migration burden on host States, primarily Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt and various European countries. The main thing is that all Syrians who want to should be able to return to their homes and take part in the restoration and development of their homeland. This process has already started. The numbers of citizens returning to Syria are already in the thousands. Of course, they need appropriate conditions for their safe and dignified return and placement, and the Syrian authorities are ready to work on providing them. In an official statement on 3 July, the Government of Syria urged its citizens to return home and affirmed its responsibility for their safety and integrity. We note that the appeal was welcomed in various States that have been hosting refugees from Syria during the conflict.

I would like to emphasize that there is no basis for the insinuations that have been made with regard to Law No. 10 have no basis, as the Syrian authorities have continually explained. A whole information campaign has been cooked up accusing Damascus of wanting to expropriate the property of critics of the current Government living abroad. But the law's only and very pertinent objective is regulating the situation related to real estate property rights, which are in a state of chaos thanks to the conflict. It is important to note that the Syrians are not rushing to implement the law and are prepared to continue discussing the details with United Nations experts.

Successfully implementing the plans for the return of refugees and internally displaced persons will require the coordinated efforts of all stakeholders in cooperation with the Syrian authorities. The specialized bodies in the United Nations system should play a major role in this, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The issue will be on the agenda of the tenth international high-level Astana-format meeting, to be held on 30 and 31 July in Sochi. Russia is taking concrete steps to help. The Centre for Refugee Reception, Distribution and Settlement has begun its work in coordination with Damascus with an extensive network of branches at checkpoints in various parts of the country.

In that context, the revival of the Syrian economy, including job creation, is a critical challenge. The war has dealt a severe blow to many sectors of Syrian industry and agriculture and has destroyed homes and infrastructure. There is an acute shortage of construction materials and heavy equipment, which also needs fuel. The education system must be restored, along with the medical field, a source of great pride for the Syrian people before the conflict. The right thing for all international partners to do would be to help the Syrian recovery efforts and refrain from clinging to artificial political dynamics. It is also long past time to lift the unilateral sanctions, whose primary victims are ordinary Syrians, as the United Nations has shown.

I would also like to touch on the issue of humanitarian mine clearance. Our Russian specialists have done tremendous work in sharing their expertise with their Syrian colleagues, and more than 1,200 local sappers have been trained. We spoke about this in detail recently in a special Security Council meeting (see S/PV.8304). We hope that the signing of the memorandum of understanding between the Syrian Government and the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) will be followed up with concrete, practical and non-politicized measures. In Raqqa alone there is a ton of work to be done, and regrettably, months after the terrorist centre there was wiped out, the so-called coalition has not done enough to make the city it destroyed habitable. We would also like to think that our international partners could help UNMAS through dedicated financing for demining projects in Syria and by providing technical support.

In conclusion, I would like to digress from purely humanitarian issues and point out that thanks to Russian specialists, both sappers and archaeologists, the monuments in Palmyra that the terrorists destroyed, which are part of the heritage of all humankind, are being restored. We expect the specialized international bodies, in particular UNESCO, to show genuine interest in this issue.

In a broader sense, it will be important to start talking about Syria's reintegration into the regional trade and economic system. Unblocking a number of internal roadways and border crossings has to be an important prerequisite for strengthening the traditional links between Syria and its partners in the region. That is by far the best way to meet the goal of normalizing relations among the States of the Middle East, and Russia is ready to support it in every way. And, of course, stabilization will also help advance the political settlement process under the auspices of the United Nations, which all members of the Security Council unanimously support.

Mr. Yao Shaojun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China thanks Mr. Lowcock, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Ms. Gamba, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, for their briefings.

China takes note of the Secretary-General's recent report on cross-border humanitarian relief operations (S/2018/724) and would like to express its grave concerns about the humanitarian situation in the country and the obstacles to humanitarian activities there. We applaud the efforts of United Nations humanitarian agencies and related parties to ease the humanitarian situation in certain parts of Syria. We hope that all Syrian parties will continue to coordinate with United Nations humanitarian relief operations. Given the ongoing conflict in some parts of Syria, we hope that the parties concerned will refrain from harming innocent civilians and work to improve the protection of children affected by the conflict. All Syrian actors must bear in mind their country's future and their people's well-being, abide by the relevant Security Council resolutions and resolve their differences through dialogue and consultations, with a view to easing the humanitarian situation as quickly as possible. In all humanitarian endeavours, it is imperative to adhere to the principles of neutrality, impartiality and non-politicization and respect Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity. The United Nations and the international community must enhance their communication and coordination with the Syrian Government and provide assistance to all areas in need.

Greater support is needed from the international community to help Syria's neighbours accommodate the large numbers of Syrian refugees. We have noted the progress made in returning Syrians to their homes. The international community must prioritize and actively support Syria's reconstruction, stepping up efforts to clear mines, improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war, minimize accidental casualties among civilians and help refugees and displaced persons return home.

Terrorist groups continue to launch attacks within Syria. We condemn the recent terrorist attack in Suwayda governorate in southern Syria. The international community must enhance cooperation and uphold uniform standards in combating all groups that the Council designates as terrorists.

Any serious improvement of the humanitarian situation in Syria requires greater efforts to promote the political process. The international community should make every effort to endorse the United Nations as the main mediation channel and support Special Envoy de Mistura in facilitating the political process, in accordance with the principle of Syrian ownership and leadership and based on resolution 2254 (2015). It is important to ensure that the Council remains united on the issue and can help to create the conditions conducive to a political settlement. China attaches great importance to the humanitarian situation in Syria. China's President, Xi Jinping recently announced another $600 million in aid to Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and other countries in support of humanitarian and reconstruction efforts on the ground. We will continue to help Syria and its neighbours affected by the flow of Syrian refugees to the best of our abilities.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation would first like to join previous speakers in condemning the recent terrorist attack perpetrated by Da'esh in Suwayda province, which claimed hundreds of lives.

My delegation thanks Mr. Mark Lowcock and Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, for their briefings.

Côte d'Ivoire remains concerned about the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Syria, the result of a resurgence in the fighting that has claimed many lives, as well as forcing the suspension of United Nations humanitarian aid delivery owing to a lack of security guarantees. We would like to recall here that the cross-border aid authorized by resolutions 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2[illegible] (2017) remains a vital element of United Nations humanitarian action in Syria, which has saved many lives and eased the suffering of thousands. While reiterating our condemnation of the military escalation in south-western Syria, Côte d'Ivoire once again calls for strict respect for resolution 2401 (2018), which demands an immediate cessation of hostilities in order to enable the unhindered and safe delivery of humanitarian aid to people in need. I therefore remind parties to the conflict of their obligations, pursuant to international humanitarian law, to protect civilians, social and educational infrastructure such as schools and health facilities, and humanitarian workers. Above all, they must refrain from obstructing the delivery of humanitarian assistance to people in distress.

My delegation welcomes the agreements on the cessation of hostilities that were reached between Government forces and armed rebel groups at the prompting of the Russian Federation. That truce should allow the delivery of humanitarian aid to people in need under safer conditions. My country also especially welcomes the joint humanitarian operation of the Russian Federation and the French Republic, which, with United Nations assistance, delivered medical assistance and basic necessities to people in eastern Ghouta. At the same time as that operation in eastern Ghouta, it is equally fortunate that nearly 40 Syrian Red Crescent trucks were able to access formerly besieged areas of the southern province of Dar'a to distribute assistance to the people who stayed behind.

Similarly, my delegation welcomes the gradual improvement in the security and health situation in Raqqa, which has enabled some 138,000 civilians to return to their homes since the liberation of the city from the grips of Da'esh in October 2017. My country encourages the international community to continue its efforts so as to respond appropriately to the humanitarian crisis in Syria and, in that regard, thanks the border countries for the multifaceted assistance provided to 5.6 million Syrian refugees.

Côte d'Ivoire, aware of the impact that that influx of refugees can have on the economy and stability of host countries, urges the international community to consider the question of the return of Syrian refugees to their homes of origin with the utmost attention. That return must take place in accordance with current international standards, which prescribe a voluntary and sustainable return of refugees under safe and dignified conditions to enable them to fully contribute to the national reconciliation process and the overall political settlement of the crisis in Syria.

My delegation believes that the international community's efforts to provide a satisfactory humanitarian response to the needs of the Syrian people must be part of the overall framework of our collective efforts to find a political solution to the crisis. Only a credible and inclusive peace process, based on the relevant provisions of resolution 2254 (2015), can provide a definitive solution to the crisis in that country.

With that in mind, my country welcomes the various initiatives aimed at relaunching the inter-Syrian dialogue process and encourages Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the political process in Syria, to take the necessary steps, within the framework of the Geneva process, to set up a committee charged with drafting the new constitution of Syria, as was decided at the Sochi meeting in Russia.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire urges the Syrian parties to embrace dialogue and to advance the political process with a view to achieving a lasting solution to the crisis, in accordance with the road map of resolution 2254 (2015). We commend the Special Envoy's personal commitment to seeking a political settlement to the Syrian crisis and assure him of our full support.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): We would also like to join others in thanking Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock and Under-Secretary-General Virginia Gamba for their briefings.

The humanitarian situation in different parts of Syria remains dire due to military operations, including in the south-west. Civilian casualties, destruction of humanitarian facilities and displacement remain alarming, as the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/724) of 20 July explained. We reiterate our call for an end to the hostilities, which are worsening the humanitarian crisis. While we express our appreciation to the United Nations and its humanitarian partners for continuing to reach millions of Syrians, as stated

by Under-Secretary-General Lowcock, it is critical to ensure quality access, in particular in some areas that have seen a change of control, in order to provide aid to all Syrians on the basis of their humanitarian needs. Access challenges — including the curtailment of cross-border operations due to lack of security assurances in south-west Syria, as stated in the most recent report of the Secretary-General — should be addressed so that safe, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access can be ensured.

Furthermore, the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure is indispensable to alleviate the suffering of civilians, including children. While it is known that all Syrians have been suffering because of the ongoing humanitarian tragedy, children have been among the most vulnerable groups. They have been killed, injured and displaced and have experienced enormous emotional, psychological and physical suffering.

We all agree that the future of Syria will be in the hands of today's children. Hence, they should be protected from any violence and be allowed to get humanitarian aid. In that regard, we thank the United Nations and its humanitarian partners for providing children with targeted assistance. However, ultimately it is the restoration of peace that can save and protect Syrian children from their unspeakable agony and allow them to realize their potential.

As we have been repeatedly stressing, ultimately it is a Syrian-led comprehensive political dialogue facilitated by resolution 2254 (2015) that can address the humanitarian tragedy in Syria.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Sweden.

We are meeting once again to discuss a report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/724) that clearly outlines how the principles and rules of humanitarian law are repeatedly and systematically violated. International calls for an end to the violence in Syria, for humanitarian access and the protection of civilians are ignored, and the resolutions of this very Council are disregarded. Yet we must continue our efforts to push for a political solution to the conflict and to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people. In our response to the plight of the Syrian crisis on children, we should be able to come together.

As we have heard today from Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Special Representative Gamba, our action is urgently needed. Time is running out for a generation of Syrian children. Syria is the most dangerous conflict-affected country for children. Last year was the deadliest yet, and unthinkably, the plight of Syria's children continues to worsen, with the number of children killed and injured in the first two months of 2018 almost surpassing last year's total. The Council, the parties to the conflict and all Member States listening today must now act to improve the situation of children trapped in the nightmare of the Syrian war.

To that end, I want to highlight four areas of the humanitarian response where we can and must do better. Acting to protect children in Syria today in these four areas will not only improve their lives, but will help build peace in Syria and prevent a relapse into conflict.

First is access. Over 5 million children are in need of humanitarian assistance. Resolution 2427 (2018) calls on all parties to allow and facilitate safe and unhindered humanitarian access to children, and it condemns unlawful denial of humanitarian access and depriving civilians, particularly children, of objects indispensable to their survival. Under-Secretary-General Lowcock has reported to us today, and indeed every month, on the unlawful denial of humanitarian access. That is also having far-reaching indirect consequences that are not always understood, but include negative coping mechanisms such as increased child labour, the recruitment of children to armed groups and an increase in child marriage. Aid workers report that 14-year-old girls are mothers to more than one child.

We call on all parties to immediately grant access to all those in need, keeping all options open for the United Nations to reach as many people as possible, including cross-border options,increased United Nations cross-line access, including to areas that have recently changed control, and to protect humanitarian workers so that they can continue to do their job.

Secondly, with regard to education, as we have heard today from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Virginia Gamba, one in three schools in Syria is closed. The result is that over 2 million children are denied their right to education. School should offer a place of stability and safety for children. However, attacks on schools have been systematic and rampant. Last year 67 attacks were reported, most of which inflicted by air strikes. Children who have been

besieged, such as those in eastern Ghouta, have often been robbed of several years of schooling.

Resolution 2427 (2018) again urges all parties to refrain from actions that impede children's access to education and strongly condemns attacks on schools. All parties to the conflict must cease all attacks on schools and give all children, including those without civil documentation, access to schools. We call for the deconfliction of schools to be stepped up, particularly in Idlib province. All attacks against schools, in contravention of international humanitarian law, must be investigated and the perpetrators brought to justice. We also call on all of us donors to step up funding for education as part of the emergency response.

The third area is mental health. The stress of war is often too much for adults; the effects on children can be profound and lifelong. Resolution 2427 (2018) stresses the importance of funding mental health and psychosocial programming in humanitarian contexts and ensuring that all affected children receive the support they need. The war in Syria has created a mental health crisis among children, with children exhibiting frequent symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Two thirds of children have lost a loved one, had their homes bombed or suffered war-related injuries. The situation is further exacerbated by sexual violence, forced marriages, sexual enslavement and trafficking of both girls and boys. Less than 5 per cent of humanitarian funding in Syria is channelled towards protection, mental health, psychosocial services or education in emergencies. We therefore encourage donors and the humanitarian community to help us change that today.

Fourth is protection. The year 2017 saw the highest number to date of grave violations against children in Syria. The majority of the children killed and injured are victims of air strikes, with systematic attacks against hospitals and medical facilities contributing to the high numbers of child casualties. Many have been separated from their families. Girls in internally displaced person camps are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence. Children with a perceived association with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant or Da'esh have unique protection concerns. Resolution 2427 (2018) emphasizes that children that have been recruited by armed groups should be treated primarily as victims of violations of international law, and it urges a focus on rehabilitation and reintegration for children formerly associated with armed groups. Syria should be no exception.

I reiterate our call on all parties to immediately implement resolution 2401 (2018) and existing de-escalation agreements in Idlib and the south and to fully respect their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law. We specifically call on Syria to implement the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which it has ratified, and to immediately cease committing the six grave violations listed.

Accountability for all violations and abuses against children and others must be ensured. We will not relent in our demands for justice at the international and national levels. We continue to believe that the situation in Syria should be referred to the International Criminal Court. Until that time, we support the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 and other relevant mechanisms in their efforts to bring about justice for crimes committed in Syria. We also call on our humanitarian partners to integrate protection earlier into the first response, and on donors to step up funding to protection efforts. That is particularly urgent in the south.

We will not stop calling for full respect for international law, including international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles, not least with regard to access. Together we must shoulder the responsibility entrusted to us. I want to voice my support for the three very concrete asks made just now by the representative of the United Kingdom. In particular, we are deeply concerned about the safety of humanitarian and medical personnel, civil defence workers, civil society, human rights activists and journalists who are at particular risk of being targeted by the Syrian forces We will follow developments closely until our next meeting, when we will take stock of the implementation of those three requests.

Were it not for the brave and determined efforts of humanitarian, health and child protection workers, the situation of children in Syria would be even worse. I want to commend the United Nations and its partner organizations for all the work that is being done to assist children in Syria. On a monthly basis, UNICEF alone reaches 3 million people in Syria. I hope that today's meeting can help to renew our efforts to help

and protect those children, to avoid losing an entire generation that deserves and needs our support.

I now resume my functions as President of Security Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Hallak (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I am surprised by the logic of representatives of some delegations who have described the liberation of Syrian territories from terrorist groups by saying that the Syrian Government is continuing to seize territories. The Syrian Army and its allies are liberating territories that were under the control of armed terrorist groups, which for many years had used children, women and the elderly as human shields. I should like to underscore from this seat that the day will come when all the aggressive military forces, without exception, will leave Syrian territory. There will be no one to carry illegal arms against the Syrian people and the Syrian State.

We had hoped to hear a collective reaction from the Security Council to the bloody massacre perpetrated by the terrorist organization Da'esh in the Al-Suwayda city two days ago.

As we are discussing the fifty-third report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/724) on the humanitarian situation in Syria, I should like to assure members of the Council once again that the Syrian Government is eager to provide all kinds of humanitarian assistance to all its citizens throughout Syrian territory. That is a duty to which it remains committed. It is also keen on cooperating and coordinating with its humanitarian partners and the United Nations, in compliance with the guiding principles of General Assembly resolution 46/182, on coordinating and strengthening humanitarian aid. The resolution also calls for respect for the sovereignty and independence of States and underlines the role of the State involved to supervise the distribution of humanitarian aid on its territories and the need to respect the principles of neutrality, integrity and non-politicization.

The constitutional and legal duties enshrined in all international instruments, including the relevant Security Council resolutions on combating terrorism, require the Syrian Government to carry out military operations in order to liberate civilians from the armed terrorist groups that were besieging them and had used them for many years as human shields.

The day before yesterday, we sent out an official letter responding to the content of the fifty-third report of the Secretary-General on the humanitarian situation in Syria, and I should like to make the following comments in that regard.

First, day after day, the Syrian State — thanks to its institutions and the support of the Syrian people and with international support from Syria's real friends, who believe in the principles of international law — is making important progress on the ground in liberating Syrian territory from the armed terrorist organizations that were spread among civilians while using them as human shields. They exploited and recruited their children and seized the humanitarian assistance that was sent to them. Those achievements and significant efforts of the Syrian national institutions have ensured support for the Syrian people and the delivery of United Nations humanitarian aid to them.

Secondly, the counter-terrorism operations carried out by the Syrian State are in line with its constitutional mandate and consistent with the principles of international humanitarian law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. For its part, the United Nations should step up its support to the Syrians, in accordance with humanitarian principles, especially in coordinating with the Syrian national institutions, rather than with the so-called local councils, which are in fact unreal entities affiliated with terrorist organizations and secession bodies. The authors of the report have been trying to promote these entities in an unprofessional way, and make up allegations on their important humanitarian role in the delivery of humanitarian aid.

Thirdly, contrary to what certain people have advocated, the successful military operations carried out by the Syrian Arab Army and its allies against armed terrorist groups that controlled certain regions classified by the United Nations as besieged or hard-to-reach, in addition to achieving compromises or reconciliation agreements in other regions, have alleviated the suffering of civilians and lowered the number of such regions, while to a great extent facilitating the delivery of humanitarian aid to them.

Fourthly, the Syrian Arab Republic stresses once again the fact that unilateral coercive economic measures imposed by the European Union, the United States and others against the Syrian Arab Republic

significantly hamper our ability to meet the basic needs of the Syrian people and to improve their means of subsistence. We note the latest United Nations report on the negative effects of those measures, which hinder humanitarian efforts at the national and international levels. This is the report of the Human Rights Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights (A/72/370) and his latest briefing to the International Syria Support Group, in which he underscored the seriousness of the continuation of such measures with regard to the humanitarian situation of Syrians, particularly in terms of health, education, electricity, water and remittances.

Fifthly, the operations led by the Syrian State to liberate Syrians from terrorism in the south of the country have unveiled the true motivations of some parties and Governments that were concerned not about meeting the needs of the Syrians who were displaced to the Syrian border with Jordan, but rather about protecting the armed terrorist groups in the region, particularly members of the White Helmets terrorist organization. This terrorist organization was and continues to be the logistical and operational hand of the terrorist Al-Nusra Front and other terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaida. Those terrorist organizations carry out attacks against Syrians and destabilize Syria and the region. The White Helmets, under orders from their sponsors, fabricate insidious information and falsify evidence to mislead the international public opinion with regard to Syria's use of chemical weapons with the aim of justifying aggressive action against Syria by certain permanent members of the Security Council.

My country stresses that the humanitarian system of the United Nations must make serious efforts to regain the confidence of the Syrian Government through a new approach to responding to the humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, based on the principles of objectivity, transparency and impartiality. However, that cannot happen if a shadow continues to be cast on the achievements of the Syrian State and its efforts to meet the needs of its people, and if a blind eye continues to be turned to certain States that support terrorists in Syria and exploit the humanitarian situation for their narrow political agendas.

My country's delegation listened carefully to the briefing of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. My delegation had sent an official response on the annual report contained in document S/2018/465. We confirm once again that the accusations made during the briefing against the Syrian Government totally and deliberately ignored the information that the Syrian Government has provided to the Secretariat, as well as the fact that the suffering of Syrian children is the result of the practices of armed terrorist groups.

The briefing and the report of the Special Representative are predicated on a false premise based on incredible information provided by suspicious sources linked to the armed terrorist groups. All the allegations made are refuted by the testimony of civilians protected by the Syrian Arab Army after having been evacuated from the areas under the control of armed terrorist groups for many years. Their testimony tells about injustice, exploitation and starvation inflicted on civilians and their children by those groups, whose crimes do not spare women, children or the elderly.

The Syrian Government has provided the Office of the Special Representative with documented information on child recruitment by armed terrorist groups. We deny and totally reject what is stated in the report and characterized as proof of recruitment of children by the Syrian Government. If that were true, why have we not received any detailed information on that issue despite our repeated requests?

The Syrian Government asks the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-general to launch an investigation into the fate of the children who were kidnapped following the terrorist bombing that targeted buses meant for the evacuation of civilians leaving the villages of Fo'ah and Kafraya in the Al-Rashidin area of Aleppo province on 15 April. According to the information held by the Syrian Government, 32 of these kidnapped children are currently at a care refuge called DAR RAF in the Reyhanli region of southern Turkey, while the rest of the kidnapped children are in the Atma refugee camp.

Finally, I want to comment on the allegations concerning Law No. 10. I would like to inform the Council that two days ago, my delegation sent a letter to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council in response to the false and deceptive allegations regarding the nature of this Law and its ends. My delegation's letter clearly defines the Law and explains its legal nature, which is to protect properties. We reject all allegations claiming that the objective of the Law is to confiscate properties.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8321

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8321 st meeting
Monday, 30 July 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Skoog	(Sweden)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Mr. Radomski
	Russian Federation	Mr. Volgarev
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

The situation in Somalia

Letter dated 5 July 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/674)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

18-24305 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Somalia

Letter dated 5 July 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/674)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Somalia to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2018/742, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/674, which contains a letter dated 5 July 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, France, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Russian Federation, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

The President: The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2431 (2018).

I now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements after the voting.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): We welcome the unanimous adoption of resolution 2431 (2018), renewing the mandate of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which has been playing an indispensable role in support of peace and reconciliation in Somalia. We thank the United Kingdom for its efforts as penholder in facilitating the negotiation of the resolution and all Council members for demonstrating flexibility and compromise in achieving the necessary consensus. Let me highlight a couple of points that were very critical for us in the negotiation of the resolution.

It is very important that the resolution we adopted today acknowledges the important contribution of AMISOM in support of the Somali political process. In spite of the political and security gains made in recent years, a lot remains to be done in terms of post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding. In this regard, AMISOM can and should play a role in carrying out civilian responsibilities complementary to the efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia. That is why the resolution stresses that AMISOM's civilian component should be fully operational so as to support AMISOM's military and police tasks, and we very much welcome this.

While the Somalia transition plan provides the strategic direction for a conditions-based process by which a gradual handover of security responsibility from AMISOM to Somali security institutions can take place, detailed planning and implementation are required to put all phases of the plan into motion. Without coordination and mutual reinforcing support among partners on the ground, we might risk a delay in the implementation of the envisaged AMISOM transition. Equally important is the need for cooperation and coordination between the United Nations Support Office in Somalia and AMISOM and the Somali National Security Forces at all levels, including through improved consultation with AMISOM in the management of the logistics support package. The resolution makes that point very clear.

Therefore, we are hopeful that during the implementation of the new mandate, we will see enhanced cooperation and coordination in providing greater support to inclusive political processes, in line with the comprehensive approach to security, leading to the transfer of primary security responsibility from AMISOM to the Somali security forces and institutions.

Last but not least, the resolution just adopted also recognizes the need for the continuous and comprehensive assessment of AMISOM, working jointly with the African Union and the Federal Government of Somalia, in order to assess the process and make recommendations on the conditions-based graduate transition from AMISOM to Somali security

responsibility, taking into account the need for an objective evaluation of capacities. We believe that this is absolutely important, and we hope that all decisions on the course of transition in Somalia will be made based on an informed decision through a closer examination of the situation on the ground.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Somalia.

Mr. Osman (Somalia): As this is the first time I speak before the Council under your leadership, Sir, I would like to congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Council for this month and to pledge our full support and cooperation to you and your team. I would also like to acknowledge the role of your predecessor in successfully leading the Council last month.

Somalia welcomes the adoption of resolution 2431 (2018), and we warmly welcome the extension of the mandate of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), as its presence remains critical as Somalia moves into the next chapter. Somalia is pleased that the resolution is grounded in Somalia's effort to progressively assume responsibility for security across the country. My country is embarking on the transition to full sovereignty, national ownership and leadership in an effort to realize the noble vision of a secure, democratic and prosperous nation that is able to meet the needs of its citizens independently. We in Somalia know that the agreed transition plan is no easy task, but with our full determination and unity and the sincere support and commitment of the international community, it is achievable. The logic of transition will guide the way forward over the next three years.

I would also like also take this opportunity to welcome the latest developments regarding the protracted conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea. We are further pleased with the signing and the steps taken to implement the joint declaration of peace and friendship to normalize relations between the two brotherly countries. With this start, many more achievements and challenges lie ahead of all of us, and my country will spare no effort to work for a peaceful and prosperous future for our region.

Since the adoption of the previous mandate, Somalia has developed a transition plan with national and international buy-in, including the endorsement of the African Union Peace and Security Council, which forms the basis for a joint United Nations-African Union review this year. We welcome in particular the emphasis that the joint review has placed this year on consultations with the Federal Government. This should be a template for future reviews, and I look forward to further engagement as we continue to implement implement the plan.

As we enter a new phase of transition, we are as committed as ever to the Somali security forces assuming responsibility for security in due course, and to gradually taking over the task and posts, such as Mogadishu stadium, from AMISOM. While the transition may take many years, it will enable detailed planning to take place in a realistic time frame and help to monitor progress and adjust plans accordingly. In addition to beginning the implementation of the priority location, as set out in the plan, the first phase lays the foundation for longer-term capacity-building over the next few years. Among other tasks, this includes enhanced support for the regional security council, rewriting the Somali military discipline code and strengthening the community policing services in selected population centeres.

Having said that, partnership will be key to a successful transition. Somalia will need continued partnership with the countries that contribute police and troops to AMISOM, but it will also need the partnership and support of donors to align the national security architecture in light of the outcome of the operational readiness assessment. This will help in building a professional, inclusive security sector capable of providing security so that Somalis can go about their everyday lives free from the threat of the terrorist group Al-Shabaab, while providing the country with a secure border and coastline.

I would like to express my gratitude to AMISOM troop-contributing countries for their commitment and enormous contribution over more than a decade in Somalia. Their deployment has created the space for political progress, for humanitarian relief efforts and for Somalia's political and State institutions to grow. There is no doubt that without their support and sacrifice, we would not have managed to degrade Al-Shabaab and accomplish what we have in such a short period.

The logistical support that the United Nations Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS) has provided to the African Union Mission in Somalia under the Security Council's mandate is crucial to my country. While the situation has improved recently, the Support

Office needs to provide an appropriate level of funding to fill the gaps in logistics and equipment for AMISOM, which is underfunded, understaffed and unequipped. We look forward to AMISOM's operational readiness assessment and reconfiguration to support the implementation of the transitional plan. We welcome the recommendation of the joint review and agree that AMISOM sector 6 should be closed and subsumed into section 2 with a view to forming a multinational sector in Jubbaland that is accountable and capable of assisting the Federal Government of Somalia and federal member states in implementing the total ban on the export of charcoal from Somalia, including by facilitating access of the monitors to the charcoal export ports.

Somalia's health-care system is very fragile and we very are very concerned that a cholera outbreak might take place if we do not control the financial and human resources. The presence of AMISOM camps around the cities — big cities, especially — without any environmental management policies adds a serious challenge to our Government and a greater burden on our health systems. Internal report 2017/145 of the Office of Internal Oversight Services revealed horrific environmental and health practices. In that regard, we kindly ask UNSOS to urgently implement the recommendations of the internal audit.

I wish to commend the efforts of the Swedish Government to provide UNSOS with an environmental expert for one year. That measure can mitigate the risk of environmental pollution and prevent the spread of a cholera epidemic or any other disease related to the absence of environmental experts and the proper waste management of AMISOM camps near the towns and big cities of Somalia

In conclusion, the Somali Government, under the leadership of President Farmajo and Prime Minister Khayre, will spare no effort to assume full responsibility at all levels in order to provide the Somali people with the security opportunities necessary for social economic progress and the benefits of a society governed by the rule of law. We thank the Council once again for the adoption of the resolution today, and we hope that this spirit of compromise and cooperation will flourish to achieve a successful drawdown.

The meeting rose at 10.25 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.8322

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8322nd meeting

Monday, 30 July 2018, 10.25 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Skoog	(Sweden)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Mr. Radomski
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

The situation in Somalia

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

18-24311 (E)

Accessible document

Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Somalia

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Djibouti, Eritrea and Somalia to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

At this meeting, the Council will hear a briefing by Ambassador Kairat Umarov, Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan, in his capacity as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) concerning Somalia and Eritrea.

I now give the floor to Ambassador Umarov.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): As mandated by sub-paragraph (g) of paragraph 11 of resolution 1844 (2008), I have the honour of briefing the Security Council in my capacity as Chair of the Sanctions Committee established pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) concerning Somalia and Eritrea, covering the period from 14 March to the end of July this year.

During the reporting period, with regard to the arms embargo on Somalia, the Committee received 10 notifications pursuant to sub-paragraph (g) of paragraph 10 of resolution 2111 (2013), three notifications from Member States pursuant to paragraph 4 of resolution 2142 (2014) and two notifications from the Federal Government of Somalia pursuant to paragraphs 2 and 9 of resolution 2385 (2017). The Committee also received two post-delivery confirmations from the Federal Government of Somalia pursuant to paragraphs 6 and 7 of resolution 2142 (2014), for which the Committee did not receive advance delivery notification.

At the outset, I wish to welcome the signing of the Joint Declaration of Peace and Friendship on 9 July this year by the President of the State of Eritrea, Mr. Isaias Afwerki, and the Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Mr. Abiy Ahmed, and salute the commitment by both parties to opening a new chapter of cooperation and partnership. We also positively note the 28 July visit of Somalia President Mr. Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed Farmajo to Asmara on the invitation of the President of Eritrea.

Today, my briefing will focus mainly on my May visit to Djibouti, Ethiopia and Somalia and ensuing Committee activities and decisions. The visit in May marked the first occasion since 2010 on which the Chair of the Committee has travelled to the Horn of Africa region. We received great cooperation from all countries we visited. All countries extended their welcome and cooperation at the highest possible level. All our interlocutors where frank in sharing with us their perspectives. The region is committed to continuing resolving issues and working towards further stability and enduring peace.

When meeting with the delegation in Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian Prime Minister noted Ethiopia's principled position in resolving conflicts by peaceful means and expressed readiness to start a dialogue with Eritrea. These views may have been the forerunner of the developments witnessed in recent days. I regret that Eritrea did not invite the delegation and did not take the opportunity to provide its views on the situation the Horn of Africa, including on the implementation of sanctions.

I wish to reiterate the Committee's continued commitment to engaging with Eritrea. In this regard, I addressed a letter on behalf of the Committee to the Eritrean chargé d'affaires of the Permanent Mission, in which I expressed the Committee's regret at the lack of response to the proposed visit to Asmara. I also called on the Eritrean authorities to cooperate with the Committee and the Somalia and Eritrea Monitoring Group.

The visit to the region was a diplomatic and trust-building exercise. The goal was to engage directly with the authorities to obtain first-hand information on the situation in the region, including on the implementation of sanctions measures on Somalia and Eritrea, and assess and the effectiveness of the measures and their implementation so as to promote peace and security in the Horn of Africa. While acknowledging and encouraging their efforts, particularly concerning notifications to the Committee, I reminded Somali officials of their obligations under the partial lifting of the arms embargo and the requirement to comply with them.

With regard to the charcoal ban, the Somali authorities expressed serious concern about the continuing charcoal trade, which contributes to

financing of the terrorist activities of Al-Shabaab. The President of Somalia noted the importance of adequate implementation of the charcoal ban, while the Prime Minister requested that the Committee sanction those individuals and entities responsible for receiving illicit Somali charcoal. The Committee will consider that request very seriously. With regard to regional dynamics, all interlocutors cited the destabilizing effects of the Yemen war on the stability of the region. The war has had an impact not only on arms flows, but also on commercial relations, investment, trade and tourism between Yemen and countries in the Horn of Africa.

In terms of sanctions on Somalia, we observed the firm resolve of the Federal Government of Somalia to portray the new Administration in a new light of reforms and willingness to take responsibility for their security and future. Although that is commendable, it is the view of the Committee that the arms embargo should not be completely lifted until Somalia undergo political and security reforms, and creates strong institutions capable of securing an adequate level of weapons and ammunition management. All interlocutors cautioned against the premature withdrawal of the African Union Mission in Somalia from the country, as they believe that Somali forces are not yet ready to fully take over responsibility for their own security. The Committee fully endorsed other recommendations aimed at the strengthening and the implementation of the sanctions measures. As such, two notes verbales reminding Member States of their respective obligations under the terms of the arms embargoes and the charcoal ban were distributed respectively on 25 and 28 of June.

I also proposed that the Committee discuss the recommendations made by the joint verification team in its first report of 1 May. The Committee met on 25 June. In that regard, the Committee has revised its implementation assistance notice on the arms embargo to include some of the recommendations made by joint verification team. As the delegation was unable to meet Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia Michael Keating during our trip to Mogadishu, the Committee held informal consultations on 20 July, during which Mr. Keating shared his insights on peace and security matters in Somalia as they relate to the sanctions regime.

In conclusion, this was an important visit during which the Committee gained invaluable insights into the current political and security situation pertaining to the Horn of Africa. The information that we gathered enabled the Committee to act so as to enhance the implementation of the sanctions measures on Somalia and Eritrea. I would like to assure Council members that the Committee will continue its contribution to the Council's efforts to achieve durable peace and stability in Somalia and the Horn of Africa.

The President: I thank Ambassador Umarov for his briefing and I express my appreciation for his leadership of the Committee.

I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): I want to thank Ambassador Kairat Umarov, in his capacity as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) concerning Somalia and Eritrea, for his briefing and for his dedicated efforts in guiding the work of the Committee. We appreciate the outcome of his visit to the region, which took him to Djibouti, Ethiopia and Somalia. I must reiterate how much we appreciate the objectivity and integrity with which he has managed the work of the Committee. Of course, much has happened since the Chair's visit, and those events have enormous implications for the work of the Committee, as well as for the sanctions regime in a number of ways.

It is altogether impossible to deny that the politics of the Horn of Africa are in the process of rapid change, with salutary implications, all of which is the result of the rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which would have been totally inconceivable only a few month ago. What has happened over the past couple of weeks is indeed historic. Following a 20-year hiatus, Ethiopia and Eritrea have decided to turn the page and open a new chapter concerning not only the normalization of relations, but the expression of commitment to building relations that truly reflect the long-standing ties between their peoples. What was once considered impossible has been made possible thanks to the courageous and bold steps taken by the leadership of the two countries. The Ethiopian and Eritrean peoples, who have longed for peace for two decades, have warmly welcomed the breakthrough with much jubilation and optimism. Gone are the days when no one could be sure how long the guns would continue to be silent between the two countries.

As just indicated, that has enormous meaning and significance not only for the peoples of the two countries, but also for the region, which has been

ravaged by conflict and crisis for far too long. It will also make a major and historic contribution to the efforts to silence the guns in Africa, while setting an example of resolving conflicts in the continent. Undeniably, the region will be in a far better position to contribute to peace in Somalia. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development will be more effective in bringing the countries of the region together to work for peace and regional cooperation in all areas much better than before.

It is in that broader context, that we would like the Security Council to understand what is happening between Ethiopia and Eritrea. That wind of change has been welcomed by the region and beyond. Undoubtedly, the positive momentum generated over the past couple of weeks must be sustained, and the international community has a responsibility to support the efforts of the two countries. We believe that the Council has a particular responsibility in that regard. Already, improved relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea seem to have facilitated the restoration of friendly relations between Eritrea and Somalia, as was evident when the President of Somalia, Mr. Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed Farmajo, paid a State visit to Eritrea a few days ago. It is impossible to ignore that that is a major boost for progress in the stabilization of the situation in Somalia. The Council must appreciate the significance of that development for the security of the region.

It appears to us very proper that the Council should support and encourage the bold steps taken by the Ethiopian Prime Minister. That has underlined how much doing things outside the box is necessary to break log jams in conflict situations, no matter how intractable they might have been in the past. If there is a recognition of the broader context that I have tried to explain just now, I do not think it would be difficult to find innovative ways of acknowledging the significance of that development in our region at a time when conflict resolution is becoming very complex and we have come to acknowledge how much the prevention of conflict should be prioritized.

The breakthrough for peace achieved between Ethiopia and Eritrea is without any doubt to be celebrated. It is Ethiopia's conviction that this welcome development is not meant to be limited to relations between the two countries. I would like to take this opportunity to assure the Council that the prevailing spirit is one of embracing, not excluding, people in the region. It is in that spirit that we are trying to do our part to help restore friendly relations between the good peoples of Djibouti and Eritrea. The Djibouti Foreign Minister visited Addis Ababa last week to deliver a message on behalf of President Guelleh to my Prime Minister. He was able to conduct very productive and useful discussions both with our Prime Minister and his counterpart, our Foreign Minister.

Ethiopia has expressed its readiness to do whatever is necessary to contribute to the normalization of relations between Eritrea and Djibouti. It is our firm conviction that such efforts are critical to peace and security in our region. The new spirit that has been created should exclude no country and is the foundation on which Ethiopia's policy is based. Naturally, that new spirit also demands that no country should continue to be isolated. The Council has an obligation in that regard.

Let me conclude by expressing our readiness to work closely with the Council in the coming months to sustain this remarkable achievement, which has enormous implications for peace and prosperity in the whole of Africa and even beyond.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Somalia.

Mr. Osman (Somalia): The Federal Government of Somalia was pleased to host the visit of Ambassador Kairat Umarov, Chair of the Committee pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) concerning Somalia and Eritrea, and other Committee members to Mogadishu on 8 May. The Committee members were briefed on some significant areas of progress during their visit. There is no doubt that the peace and security challenges facing Somalia remain daunting but the Administration of President Farmajo is making a serious attempt to address them, in line with many of the recommendations of the Somalia and Eritrea Monitoring Group.

Sanctions are designed as a tool to help tackle security challenges, and we share the same aims of preventing weapons from falling into the hands of terrorists, cutting off funding to Al-Shabaab and ensuring that Somalia's resources of fish stocks and charcoal cannot be exploited for the purpose of destabilizing the country. Combating terrorism is not only a military endeavour; it must include good governance, inclusive politics, reconciliation and the work of combating corruption. The objectives of the Federal Government of Somalia and those of the Sanctions Committee are aligned in those areas. But the Somalia of today is not the Somalia

on which sanctions were first imposed. Al-Shabaab remains a vicious threat and we must continue to implement measures that choke off its resources and limit its ability to attack innocent people. However, Somalia has made considerable progress with regard to public financial management, security-sector reform, weapons management and accountability.

There is a long way to go, but the Committee and the Monitoring Group should focus their efforts on areas where the threat of instability is greatest. The Monitoring Group has one of the widest mandates of all sanctions regimes. We believe that Somalia's progress should be reflected in the Group's mandate and focus and that the Security Council should take into account the Federal Government's strong commitment to continued progress. My Administration is making a genuine attempt to improve our system's processes and standards. We recognize that there are those who benefit from the status quo and seek to slow down or reverse our progress. We therefore urge the Council to support us by focusing on spoilers, not on the people engaged in the challenging tasks of State-building.

We have demonstrated our commitment to improving aspects of our compliance with the sanctions regime through requests for the Security Council to review and update its existing measures. For example, paragraphs 10 (c) and 11 (a) allow weapons to go to security institutions in Somalia that fall outside national structures, such as undefined Somali security forces and strategic partners of the African Union Mission in Somalia, without prior notification or proper weapons-and-ammunition management processes in place, which is problematic and exacerbates arms proliferation in our country. Our Government would appreciate a careful review and revision of those paragraphs. The Somali Government will continue to build on that and, as set out in Somalia's Transition Plan, will develop standard operating procedures to achieve a comprehensive weapons-and-ammunition management system and establish a management commission to counter the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, with the aim of ensuring safe and effective distribution, storage and security of stocks and trained personnel at both the Federal Government and federal member state levels.

We are committed to ensuring that Somalia's resources are not used to finance Al-Shabaab's operations. In February the National Security Council endorsed an interim fisheries revenue-sharing agreement. In April the Cabinet agreed to ban the domestic sale of charcoal along with improving the implementation of the charcoal ban. It is also important to us that Somalia's precious natural resources be retained to assist in the vital process of our economic regeneration. That means tackling illegal fishing and ensuring that Somalia's waters and rich fish stocks can provide a livelihood for Somalis and help make stability sustainable. On 5 June the National Security Council reached an agreement on the ownership, management and sharing of the country's natural resources, as was stated in our agreement on natural-resource sharing.

Somalia is a country emerging from decades of war battling brutal insurgents. We are demonstrating a strong commitment to reforming our institutions and meeting our obligations under the sanctions regime. Our efforts are slowly bearing fruit, but too often we are criticized for what we have not yet achieved rather than recognized for our progress. Our capacity is still in the early stages, but building it will require the support of our partners in the Security Council and its subsidiary bodies. We hope we can count on their steadfast support to our continued progress.

Lastly, we should not ignore developmeats in the region. I would like to take this opportunity to again welcome the most recent developments in the protracted conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia. We also welcome the signing of steps to implement the Joint Declaration of Peace and Friendship on normalizing relations between the two brotherly countries. President Farmajo made a State visit to Eritrea last week. Somalia stresses the importance of ensuring that Eritrea and Djibouti can agree as soon as possible on the means for a peaceful settlement of all the unresolved disputes between the two States. I thank the Council again and wish it the best.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Eritrea.

Mr. Idris (Eritrea): It is a great honour to address the Security Council on behalf of the Eritrean people, whose struggle to create a peaceful and cooperative neighbourhood is a matter of historical record. Three generations of Eritreans have paid the ultimate sacrifice to establish a regional order based on international law and economic complementarity, while being mindful of the shared culture and history of the people.

In recent weeks, the Horn of Africa has witnessed a development of historic proportions. Eritrea and Ethiopia have taken a bold step to end their state of

war and open a new chapter of peace and friendship. The war that prevailed for the past two decades has had devastating consequences that have gone beyond the two countries and peoples involved. It has obstructed meaningful cooperation and undermined regional conflict-prevention and -resolution mechanisms. The agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia puts an end to that distorted regional order of enmity and competition, and opens new horizons for sustainable peace and economic integration. It will strengthen the subregional conflict-prevention and -resolution mechanism. Moreover, today Eritrea and Somalia signed the Joint Declaration of Peace and Friendship during the historic visit of His Excellency Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed Farmajo to Eritrea. They have agreed to exchange ambassadors, forge political, economic, social, cultural, defence and security cooperation and join hands to address obstacles to regional peace and security. The positive repercussions of those developments for the entire region cannot be overstated.

It has long been evident that the sanctions on the people of Eritrea cannot be justified in the name of maintaining international peace and security. They have been kept despite the fact that the pretexts for their imposition have been shown to be false for years. In that regard, far from helping to promote peace and amity in the region, the Council has undermined and derailed regional cooperation for a decade. Within the emerging regional context, we find it inexplicable that the Council is discussing the sanctions on Eritrea today. The most appropriate action for the Council would have been lifting the sanctions, thereby indicating in unequivocal terms its support to the recent positive developments. Eritrea welcomes the calls by several countries, including Ethiopia and Somalia, for lifting the sanctions. We find it unacceptable that just a few members of the Council continue to set conditions and move the goalposts, with the intention of keeping political pressure on the people of Eritrea for reasons not related to the maintenance of international peace. As in the past, it is clear that whatever Eritrea does in fulfilling its commitment to the Council's resolutions, and regardless of the changes that the region has been witnessing, those members are unwilling to lift these unjustified punitive measures.

The Security Council should not miss another opportunity to contribute positively to regional peace and security in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea. What is at stake is the Council's credibility in the eyes of the citizens of the region. By lifting the sanctions immediately and unconditionally, the Council can send a positive message that it supports the desire of the citizens of the region to live in peace and prosperity together, and that the Council is ready to accompany them on their arduous journey to remove the obstacles to regional integration. The other option for the Council is to maintain business as usual by imposing preconditions, moving the goalposts and keeping these politically motivated sanctions without justification. The message to the citizens of the region will be that the Council is unwilling to work together with the regional developments and will continue to encourage spoilers seeking to undermine the unfolding peace and integration.

For its part, Eritrea will remain committed to redoubling its efforts and joining hands with the countries in the region to ensure peace and accelerate socioeconomic progress in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Djibouti.

Mr. Doualeh (Djibouti): At the outset, I would like to thank Ambassador Kairat Umarov, Chair of the Committee pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) concerning Somalia and Eritrea, for his briefing covering the period from March 2018 to the end of July 2018, and particularly for his visit in May to the region, including Djibouti. I believe the visit gave the Committee an excellent opportunity for direct interaction with the authorities in the region and consultation with them on how best to address some of the issues that continue to plague the region and damage efforts to achieve peace, development and prosperity.

Djibouti too regrets that Eritrea did not invite its delegation or take this opportunity to provide its views on the situation in the Horn of Africa, including the implementation of sanctions. As its refusal to invite the Chair or cooperate with the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea demonstrated, Eritrea continues to display a pattern of behaviour characterized by denial, obstruction and obfuscation.

As we stated in our letter to the Secretary-General, which has been circulated to the members of the Security Council, Djibouti welcomes the latest positive developments regarding the protracted conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia and the Council's readiness to support both countries in their implementation of their

Joint Declaration of Peace and Friendship. That is indeed a development we should all embrace and celebrate, because the region has experienced various intra- and inter-State conflicts with dire economic and social consequences for far too long. They have depressed and disrupted economic development and hampered efforts towards regional integration. Apart from the physical destruction of life and property, these conflicts have diverted scarce resources from development to support war. It might be worth assessing the region's cumulative losses in gross domestic product as a result of conflicts, since it stands to reason that any such study would undoubtedly prove that the benefits of investing in peace far outweigh the costs. Silencing the guns and realizing a conflict-free Africa is a challenging task, but we should all work in earnest with full commitment to that goal. The peoples of the Horn are incredibly brave and talented and, given a chance, they can show a phenomenal can-do spirit.

Djibouti concurs with the assessment by the Heads of State of the African Union (AU), as underlined in the AU Assembly decision adopted on 2 July in Nouakchott regarding the unresolved border dispute between Djibouti and Eritrea. It emphasizes that there is an urgent

> "need for all countries in the Horn of Africa to engage towards maximizing possibilities for achieving lasting peace in the entire region".

It requests the AU Commission to continue with its efforts to assist Djibouti and Eritrea in reaching a peaceful solution to their territorial dispute and urges both countries to extend the necessary cooperation to the Commission. Let me state unequivocally that Djibouti stands ready to work with the Commission. In the same vein, Djibouti welcomes the letter dated 17 July by the Secretary-General regarding the ongoing border dispute between the Republic of Djibouti and the State of Eritrea with a view to assisting the countries, in collaboration with the Security Council, in finding a way forward either through mutually agreed arbitration or other means of peaceful dispute settlement for both parties.

Djibouti has invested in peace. We have submitted a legal memorandum and a comprehensive statement of the pertinent facts and legal principles applicable to this matter and other matters that form part of the dispute and have promptly provided a list of prisoners of war in our custody. As the Secretary-General begins to undertake consultations, we need to approach the resolution of this conflict in good faith and with an open mind, while bearing in mind that the conflict has been going on for the last 10 years, and we have gone through six years of fruitless negotiations under the auspices of Qatar. The Council should urge Eritrea, in line with paragraph 40 of resolution 2385 (2017), to meaningfully engage in the mediation efforts led by the Secretary-General in collaboration with the Security Council. We cannot afford to squander the opportunity we have to build and own a future of peace and development in the region. It is worth recalling that the Qatar-led mediation effort broke down as soon as it began because Eritrea refused to appoint a member to the body that was established to mediate and has never really shown any serious commitment of peace.

While noting the potential prospects for peace in the region, there is no escaping the fact that the international boundary remains disputed. Eritrea continues to occupy Djiboutian territory, prisoners of war remain unaccounted for, threats of force continue to emanate from the Eritrean side and the risk of violent confrontation remains high. As documented in the most recent report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea (S/2017/925), there is ongoing activity on the Eritrean side of the border at Ras Doumeira, and the situation is vulnerable to manipulation by spoilers. Furthermore, as documented in successive Monitoring Group reports, Eritrea continues to recruit, train and equip Djibouti rebels at the Anda'ali training camp, from where they conduct violent raids on villages in Djibouti and attacks on Djiboutian security forces. The Monitoring Group's report goes on to provide a detailed account, based on testimonies by former fighters, of how they participated in violent cross-border abduction raids, including the abduction of children. We call on Eritrea to stop stealing the lives of these children, who are often psychologically traumatized and are a loss to their communities and nation.

When it does these things, Eritrea defiantly ignores Security Council resolutions. If those resolutions are to be regarded as more than empty and meaningless gestures, the sanctions for non-compliance must remain in place as long as Eritrea refuses to comply with them. At the same time, Djibouti would support action by the Council to facilitate Eritrea's compliance by laying out a clear path within a reasonable timetable towards that end. In that regard, Djibouti would like to make the following observations.

First, with respect to ending Eritrea's support to armed groups, the Council should resolve to send a monitoring mission to Eritrea within a month, on condition that Eritrea commits to full cooperation with it, including granting full access to all information and records deemed necessary and all personnel whom the mission considers it necessary to interview. The mission would report to the Council within 30 days of its return from Eritrea.

Secondly, with regard to prisoners of war, the Council should require that Eritrea account for them to the same monitoring mission and permit access for the mission and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Lastly, based on the good offices of the Secretary-General and in close collaboration with the Security Council, the Secretary-General should convene an urgent meeting of the parties to facilitate an agreement between them through mutually acceptable means for peaceful dispute settlement, as set forth in Article 33 of the Charter of the United Nations. The Secretary-General should issue his recommended solution within 120 days and require that Eritrea and Djibouti either accept that solution or, in the event that one of them does not, submit the dispute to the International Court of Justice for a final and binding resolution. It is Djibouti's view that this path and timetable would offer Eritrea a fair, reasonable and prompt way to resolve outstanding issues in a manner that vindicates the actions of the Council and ensures compliance with international law.

On Somalia, Djibouti is heartened by the outcome of the Somalia partnership forum and the progress that Somalia is making in a number of critical areas. We welcome the endorsement of the transition plan by the African Union Peace and Security Council and the commitment to its implementation as expressed in its communiqué of 27 July. The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) continues to play a critical enabling role as Somalia strives to develop its capabilities in order to gradually assume responsibility for security. AMISOM deserves the continued support of the international community. In that regard, Djibouti welcomed the renewal of AMISOM's mandate through the adoption of resolution 2431 (2018) earlier this morning.

(*spoke in French*)

In conclusion, the emergence of a new Horn of Africa is now possible and a goal that is within our reach. Djibouti stands fully ready to deliver on its contribution with the aim of achieving a comprehensive, lasting and robust peace in the region for the benefit of our peoples. Getting bogged down in the past is not an option. Let us work together to build a better future for our children.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. Before adjourning the meeting, and as this may be the Council's last meeting in the month of July, I would like to express the sincere appreciation of the delegation of Sweden to all those who have supported us in our presidency during the past month.

First, I want to thank our colleagues from the Security Council Affairs Division for their professionalism and courtesy over the past month, including the Conference Management Service, officers, interpreters, verbatim reporters and security staff, who have, as always, done an outstanding, very generous and supportive job. I thank all of them. I also want to thank other parts of the Secretariat that have supported us on substance updates, and so forth, and as briefers on a regular basis.

Of course, I want to thank all the members of the Council and their teams for their support, excellent cooperation and constant good spirits at every level. I am particularly pleased that we have been able to come together to speak with one voice on so many issues this month. I also thank other Member States for their engagement, support and, in many cases, very valuable contributions to the open debates that we have had. I also thank the media and civil society for their consistent engagement.

Finally, I want to say a huge thank-you to my fantastic team, many of whom are here today and who have worked very hard over the past month. As a final comment, I know that I have the support of all members in speaking on their behalf when I say good luck to Ms. Pierce and her team. We feel absolutely at ease handing the gavel over to her.

The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.